

Sketch

Discord drowns out the plot



Simon Hoggart

TREASURY questions in the Commons has come to resemble an opera by a modern composer — Harrison Birtwistle perhaps. It is discordant unexpected notes intrude into the theme. Just when you think you know where the music is going, curious "pink plink" noises appear, dragging it off in another direction.

In the background is the rumbling basso of the Chancellor. He is chanting statistics at us. "Twenty-two million" he proclaims, followed by "a £1.2 billion windfall levy", and "£500 billion". Behind him a chorus of sycophants is singing in counterpoint. "The Government is improving child care disrepair," they cry. "Does that reply not show that the British government is taking a lead and that other European Union countries are following our lead?" says another.

The audience cranes forward earnestly, trying to understand the music, desperate to pick up a thread, terrified of appearing philistine. Others however, upper-class yahoos, are determined to disrupt the performance by jeering and hissing.

David Heathcoat-Amory, a Tory spokesman, tried to sabotage the masterwork. He pointed out that Business Age had accused the Paymaster-General, Geoffrey Robinson, of making a fortune buying and selling companies to and from the late Robert Maxwell, that model of financial probity. Should not Mr Robinson resign?

Alistair Darling, the Chief Secretary, tried to quieten the hecklers by accusing them in

turn of ignoring the mis-selling of pensions. By this time, the audience was bewildered. What could it mean? A Labour lickspittle averred that the new job plans were "good news for business, and a great deal for the unemployed".

The Chancellor broke off from his recitative of statistics ("£68,000 at an 80 per cent marginal rate, 100,000 at 90") to rally support.

"Every member of this House should regard himself as an Ambassador for the New Deal!" he cried, like Henry V at Agincourt. "And gentlemen in England, now abed, shall think themselves accursed they were not at a Welfare to Work seminar and workshop..."

A counter-tenor voice cuts in. It is Peter Lilley, the shadow chancellor, who in appearance, voice and manner more closely resembles Niles Crane in *Frasier* every day. He is jabbering: "tax credits... new system of quarterly payments... corporation rate tax increase." Even the most enthusiastic fans of modern music are beginning to have their doubts.

Finally, the villain himself, Geoffrey Robinson, appears at the despatch box. Melodramatically, he points forward. Labour had helped pensioners. The other side should hang their heads in shame!

A Tory, Ian Bruce, one of the trolls of the mountain lair, points back at him. The best way of keeping tax rates down for pensioners would be for rich businessmen not to keep their assets offshore!

Mr Robinson is outraged. "You should be ashamed of your question," he shouts, as the horns and timpani rumble threateningly.

But why? What is shameful about attacking a taxation minister who has kept £12 million of his own loot entirely free of tax? The audience, terrified of being bullied, runs to the crash bar, hoping that the second half will be Puccini's *Great Expectations*. But it's the Scotland Bill (Committee), so they're out of luck.

Review

Ballad repertoire with class touch

John Fordham

Tommy Smith
Pizza Express, Soho

TOMMY Smith, the Scottish tenor saxophonist and composer, manages to be both singularly dedicated and possessed of a worldly shrewdness at the same time. But if he was one of the lean-and-thoughtful, plucky jazz stars of the 1960s, he was never so preoccupied with his image that his promotion drowned out the music.

This week, his new CD, *Sounds Of Love*, neatly emerges in time for Valentine's Day. But there's nothing fluffy about the music he plays on it.

Smith has grown increasingly interesting over a longer career than he looked as if he could possibly have had. He was a teenage prodigy in Scotland in the early 1960s, and had been on national TV playing the sax at 15 — then went to the US to study and joined vibraphonist Gary Burton's band.

He has gone through a John Coltrane phase, and a Jan Garbarek phase, and at times in *Sounds Of Love* implies he's

going further back to a Stan Getz phase. But Smith's control and perfectionism are something to behold, and he generally commanded the attention of the *Pizza Express* (give or take a few jobbers in the back tables) by taking the risk of performing a virtually all-ballad repertoire.

He was considerably aided in this by the accompaniment of Julian Joseph on piano, who seems capable of injecting intensity into everything and hardly ever plays a cliché, even in styles usually littered with them. Joseph, who hadn't even seen the music before the night's show, struck up an unexpectedly harmonious relationship with Ronnie Scott's former drummer Martin Drew, one of the best European percussionists for acoustic piano music, but by generation and inclination a long way removed from Joseph's regular drum partner, Mark Mondesir.

With fourth member Dave Green growling on the chord changes as if his double-bass were a trombone, the interplay between the musicians grew steadily.

Smith was hypnotic in his concentration, and Julian Joseph's playing was a delight all night. A four-way class act.



Rita and John Restorick are yesterday shown around the Bessbrook checkpoint where their son, Lance Bombardier Stephen Restorick, was shot dead by an IRA sniper a year ago

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS RODWELL

Adams gets tough over threat of Sinn Fein's expulsion

continued from page 1

was used to kill Mr Campbell. DAAD is a front organisation for the IRA.

But the attacks may not have been sanctioned by the IRA leadership, and mounted instead by frustrated hardliners. The governments

might argue that this allows Sinn Fein to stay. But that would risk a Unionist walk-out and a loyalist backlash.

Sinn Fein is presenting the circumstances of the UDP's expulsion three weeks ago as unrelated to its own. Sinn Fein backed the decision to

suspend the UDP after the Ulster Freedom Fighters admitted the killings of three Catholics. The UDP represented the UFF at the talks.

Mr Adams said: "Any attempt to draw any comparison between Sinn Fein and the UDP is absolutely bogus."

The Government's own ground rules for the talks, published with the Northern Ireland Negotiations Act, 1996, made it clear that Sinn Fein could only gain a place at the conference table if there was a restoration of the IRA's 1994 ceasefire.

Fall in mature students blamed on tuition fees

John Carvel
Education Editor

A SHARP drop in numbers of mature students applying for university raised fears last night that the Government's plans to encourage lifelong learning were being scuppered by the introduction of tuition fees.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service reported applications among students over 24 were 18.3 per cent down on last year.

This compared with a drop of 1.9 per cent in applications from under-21s and 13.4 per cent among 21- to 24-year-olds.

Tony Higgins, the service's chief executive, said school-leavers appeared to be undeterred by introduction of a £1,000 fee and phasing out of the student maintenance grant.

"They clearly see 40 years of earning power ahead of them and every prospect, with a degree, of a good job which will enable them to pay their debts off."

"But potential mature students may include people out of work, whose employment

prospects may not be so good even after qualifications. Others are likely also to have bigger financial commitments already, like mortgages and other borrowing, and may be less willing to take on more."

"When everyone is trying to promote the idea of lifelong learning, the figures for mature students seem a bit of a blow."

'They are likely to have financial commitments like mortgages'

Baroness Blackstone, the higher education minister, said the figures for the younger age group showed they understood the fairness of the Government's proposals on fees.

"They clearly recognise that higher education will be a good investment for them," she added.

Older applicants were more likely to apply after the initial

December 15 deadline, on which the Ucas statistics were based.

The figures also showed a 15 per cent drop in applications for teacher training courses.

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, said: "Ministers have announced more money for recruiting teachers to raise standards of literacy and numeracy in our schools, yet by introducing tuition fees, they are driving away would-be applicants in droves."

There was a 30.7 per cent fall in applications from the Republic of Ireland where tuition fees were scrapped two years ago, but a 79.7 per cent increase in the number of English students applying to join the final three years of Scottish university courses — avoiding the fourth-year fee from which only Scottish and other EU students will be exempted.

It is understood that some of the biggest increases in applications have been recorded by newer universities, including Thames Valley, the West of England, Staffordshire, and Leeds Metropolitan.

Centenary celebration for Lord they thought was 99

Michael White
Political Editor

LEADERS of all parties in the Lords yesterday paid tribute to Lord Granville of Evesham on his 100th birthday — but only after being officially assured that his birth certificate does not say he is 99.

The former Liberal MP, whose ministerial career peaked as an unpaid parliamentary private secretary in the National Government coalition of 1931-36, was present in his wheelchair to hear kind words, led by the Leader of the Lords, Lord Richard, a strapping 66.

But doubts about Lord Granville's eligibility might have prevented the ceremony. Most reference books, including Who's Who and Dod's Parliamentary Companion, list his date of birth as February 12, 1899. It was only when Buckingham Palace sent notice of an impending centennial telegram that checks were instituted by his family.



Lord and Lady Granville at the House of Lords yesterday

Lord Granville, who fought at Gallipoli and is said to have Turkish shrapnel in his back to this day, defected to Labour after losing his Suffolk seat in 1951. He fought the seat for Labour, but lost.

Lady Granville, who married him in 1943, said: "We had never had occasion to look at his birth certificate. We always thought he was 99."

Lord Richard told peers: "He was an MP as long ago as 1929 and joined the Lords comparatively recently, in 1967. I ask the whole House to join with me in wishing him a very happy 100th birthday."

For the Lib Dems, Lord Rodgers, who once defected the other way, spoke of "a life of distinction and courage". Lord Cranborne, the Tory leader in the Lords, called him "a distinguished former member of both houses of parliament and a gallant former soldier".

Until Lords reforms were assured that Buckingham Palace's records were better than those of Who's Who, 99-year-old Lord Denning was assumed to be the oldest peer.

Lord Shilwell made a speech in the Lords on his 100th birthday in 1984, the only peer in 700 years of bloodthirsty aristocracy to survive that long in good shape.

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Female world champion's challenge for licence

Breasts, PMT and the pill bar women from boxing

John Duncan
Sports Correspondent

WOMEN should not be licensed to box professionally because pre-menstrual tension makes them unstable, Croydon industrial tribunal heard yesterday.

The claim was made as the British Boxing Board of Control defended its decision to refuse a licence to British woman boxer Jane Couch, the world welterweight champion. Without a BBBC licence Ms Couch cannot appear on any officially sanctioned competitions and must work in unlicensed halls with unlicensed referees and inadequate medical protection.

The BBBC also said water retention during menstruation could cause problems in making the weight that injuries to breasts could confuse doctors trying to diagnose breast cancer; that water

retention could make women's brains more vulnerable to damage; and that they could be pregnant and risk harm to their foetuses. On top of that, oral contraceptives or painkillers for heavy periods could contravene the sport's drug regulations.

The BBBC denied its refusal was simply because Ms Couch was a woman. But her lawyer, Dinah Rose QC, told the tribunal: "It is the most audacious defence of a sex discrimination case I have heard in 10 years. It is based on the crudest gender stereotypes of women by representatives of the last bastion of male sport."

"When women were barred from running the marathon they were told it was because of the danger that their womb would fall out. We believe the BBBC's case falls into that category."

Ms Couch told the tribunal that she had been offered £10,000 to fight an American,

Dora Webber, at Wembley Arena by promoter Prince Eliaides. But the offer was dependent on a BBBC licence, which she was refused on June 11 last year.

Normally applications for a licence go to an area council before going to national level for approval but Ms Couch's case was heard immediately by the board. They discussed the matter for 20 minutes before rejecting her application because of doubts over the medical risks.

Leonard Read, the BBBC chairman, admitted that there was no evidence that boxing was more dangerous to women than men. Nor had the BBBC commissioned any research on the subject.

"I was never medically examined by the board or asked about my health," Ms Couch said in evidence. "I have no lumps on my breasts. I do not suffer from fluid retention. I do not suffer from pre-menstrual tension and so my per-

formance has never been affected by it. I do not suffer from painful periods. Female boxers undergo a pregnancy test before each bout, therefore a pregnancy cannot be used as a reason to deprive me of a licence. I am not on the pill."

When questioned by the panel, Mr Read said that the board felt that women were more "fragile" than men and were more likely to get "damaged".

Mr Read also pointed to "dramatic" changes to the rules that would be needed to allow women to come under the auspices of the BBBC.

"It comes down to a vest actually, doesn't it Mr Read," said Ms Rose.

"It comes down to boxers not being able to wear anything above the waist," said Mr Read.

Monthly syndrome causes aggression — 'a distinct advantage in the ring'

Sarah Boseley

PRE-MENSTRUAL tension (PMT) would be more likely to give women an unfair advantage in the boxing ring than make them unfit to don their gloves, said Katharina Dallion, the gynaecological endocrinologist credited

with naming the syndrome. "It will make them much more aggressive and better boxers."

She added: "There are many women who would be infinitely better boxers during their pre-menstruum. They would be twice as aggressive. I agree it could be difficult. It is not fair, for

instance, to have a woman with PMT fighting one who has not got it."

"Women who go into netball or hockey run twice as fast and hit the ball twice as hard when they have PMT."

It was possible, however, that women who wanted to go into boxing would have naturally occurring high levels of testosterone, and would be unlikely to suffer from PMT.

Not every woman suffers from the syndrome. As recently as last summer, researchers in Australia were disputing its very existence,

claiming that men and women who did not claim to suffer from PMT were equally susceptible to mood swings. Their report caused an outcry from sufferers and some doctors in this country, where it is normally accepted that 80 per cent of women have some form of PMT at some point in their lives.

The most common emotional symptoms of PMT are irritability, tension, depression and fatigue. Physical symptoms include breast tenderness, headache, backache and lower abdominal pain.



Coming out fighting... World welterweight champion Jane Couch working out in the gym

PHOTOGRAPH: ANTONIO OLIVAS

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English is most commonly taught language in Europe

Stephen Bates in Brussels

BRTAIN may still be on the periphery of Europe as far as her EU partners are concerned, but English is taking over as the Continent's most common language, according to statistics released in Brussels yesterday.

They show that almost 90 per cent of all youngsters are now being taught English as a second language, much to the chagrin of the French who have discovered their language has been supplanted everywhere beyond its borders except in the institutions of the European Union.

Fewer than a third of non-French speaking children are now being taught French as their second language.

German comes a poor third — just 18 per cent learn it as a second language, followed by 8 per cent learning Spanish. Even in primary schools, a quarter of European youngsters are taught English, with French being taught to just 4 per cent of non-Francophones.

The French government is so concerned that it is

making strenuous efforts to sponsor language teaching, both in the EU applicant countries of Eastern Europe and in the Far East. A recent gathering of Francophone nations found more than 100 where the language is spoken, but only a handful where it is spoken by more than a tiny minority.

The British are maintaining their reputation for not being able to speak foreign languages — the survey

The French are concerned and are sponsoring language teaching

shows that the UK is alone among member states, except for Ireland, in not teaching primary school children a second language. Even at secondary level it does not compete with the range of languages taught elsewhere, such as Finland, Holland and Luxembourg where between two and three extra languages are the norm.

The educational statis-

tics, drawn up by Eurostat, the EU's statistical unit, indicate accelerating trends for children to start school earlier — most three-year-olds in many countries have already started schooling — and a doubling of the numbers entering higher education over the last two decades.

At nursery level, all four-year-olds now have school places in France, Spain and Belgium and 97 per cent of those in Holland.

Britain is claimed to have places for 94 per cent of its four-year-olds. In the EU as a whole, only 31 per cent of those in their 20s have left school without a certificate and 58 per cent of all 15 to 24-year-olds are considered to be still in education or training.

There are nearly 12 million students in higher education. The survey, drawn from returns sent in by member states, shows British children having both among the highest number of hours of teaching a year, and, in infant schools, among the lowest teacher-pupil ratios: 13 to one, compared with 25 to one in Spain and Italy and 30 to one in Greece.

News in brief

Call to update assembly

SCHOOL assemblies should focus less on Christianity and instead be modernised to reflect the changing nature of British society, according to a report published today by the Religious Education Council. It calls on the Government to review the law requiring to provide a daily act of collective worship of a broadly or mainly Christian nature.

Instead, schools would have a statutory requirement to provide "regular gatherings with a moral and spiritual dimension". The report also calls for schools to provide gatherings that allow time for personal worship and quiet reflection.

Autistic sons appeal delay

ANGELA White, of Greenford, west London, who is fighting in the Court of Appeal to send her two autistic sons to the Higashi School in America, had her case adjourned yesterday for further legal argument. Her counsel protested after three judges ruled that local education authorities and special educational needs tribunals were not legally obliged to name appropriate schools "in every case".

Fine follows coach crash

A COACH company was fined yesterday for faulty brakes on a coach that crashed on the M2 in Kent in 1993, killing nine American tourists and the driver.

Sittingbourne magistrates fined Bretton, formerly the Travellers Coach Company, £5,000 for operating a coach with a defective speedlimiter and £4,000 for the defective brakes, plus costs of £1,587. The firm was not in court yesterday, but had pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing to a defective speedlimiter.

The court heard that the ABS braking system only worked intermittently, and the coach's front wheels locked moments before it crashed into a Transit van and then rolled down an embankment.

Voters drawn by strippers

A STUDENT union staged a male and female strip show yesterday to encourage members to attend its AGM. Last year the meeting at Bristol university failed to attract its quorum of 100. But yesterday 800 came to vote on a motion to have strippers proposed by Naz Sear, union secretary, who said: "I am glad we did it. Loads of people turned up and they debated the serious issues as well."

Fulham win ground fight

FULHAM Football Club, led by its chairman Mohamed Al Fayed, yesterday survived a renewed court attempt by environmentalists to block the £7 million redevelopment of its ground at Craven Cottage.

The Court of Appeal dismissed a challenge by objectors, led by local resident Lady Berkeley, to a High Court ruling last March which approved the scheme. Lady Berkeley had said that John Gummer, the former environment secretary, and the inspector appointed to hold a public inquiry did not fully consider the scheme's impact on the Thames river frontage, part of a conservation area.

She said a full environmental statement should have been called for.

The appeal judges said the inquiry was thorough and a statement would not have affected the outcome.

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24/11/98

Priest guilty of sex assault

Geoffrey Gibbs

A ROMAN Catholic priest was last night facing the prospect of up to two years in jail after being found guilty of indecent assault against a girl aged 13.

In a case that has brought further embarrassment to the Catholic Church over the behaviour of some of its priests, Cardiff crown court heard that Father John Lloyd, 57, a former press officer to the Archbishop of Cardiff, took the schoolgirl back to his home after baptising her in his church.

He indecently assaulted her before driving her back to her grandmother's house.

The girl, now an adult, was one of four women and two men who gave evidence that Lloyd indecently assaulted them when they were children.

The alleged assaults were said to have taken place between 1970 and 1980 when Lloyd worked in two parishes near Pontypridd and at Cwystow, south Wales.

Lloyd, who has been a priest for 32 years, had denied four charges of rape and 17 counts of indecent assault against the children who were then aged between eight and 13.

After two days considering the evidence the jury of eight women and four men acquitted him on the rape charges and on seven of the indecent assaults. They failed to reach majority verdicts on the remaining indecent assault charges.

The Archbishop of Cardiff, John Ward, said he was "deeply saddened and ashamed" by the events that had led to the priest's conviction. In a statement at the end of the trial he said Father

Lloyd would exercise no further public ministry.

"My sympathy goes out to all those who have suffered through his actions and to their families. The families had every right to expect a high standard of pastoral care from Father Lloyd and they justifiably believe that their trust has been betrayed."

Richard Twomlow, prosecuting, alleged that Lloyd used his power over children to sexually abuse them in the knowledge that they would not be believed if they reported him.

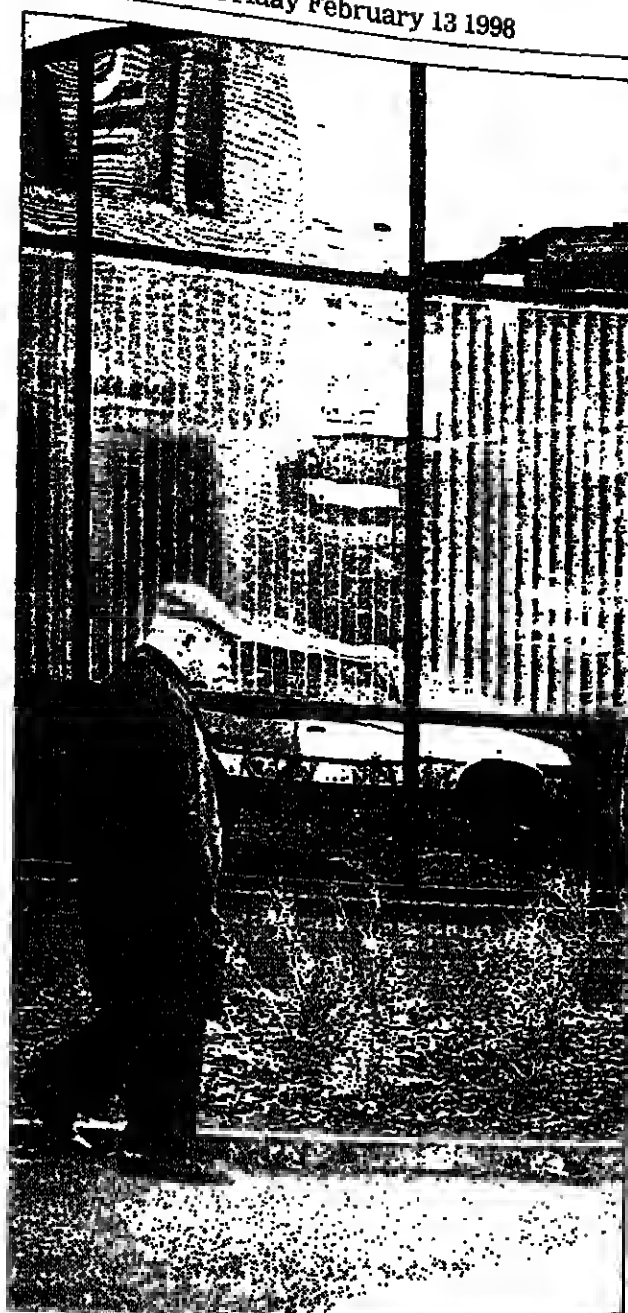
Police brought charges after one woman, now aged 36, complained of the abuse she said she suffered as a nine-year-old. Others then made similar complaints.

Lloyd, who denied all the charges, was alleged to have raped the nine-year-old when she was alone with him in the curtains-off confession of her primary school near Pontypridd.

Remanding him in custody to await sentence next week, Mr Justice Roush warned Lloyd that a jail term was "virtually inevitable".



Father John Lloyd: cleared of rape allegations



Scenes from Slough... Some of the 110,000 inhabitants of the Berkshire town, the home of Dulux paint, Horlicks, Mars bars and Cellnet



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARTIN ARGLES and ANDREW TESTA

Hughes asked for poetic justice so town may slough image of despond

John Ezard

THE Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes, was asked yesterday to pause awhile from Sylvia Plath and help to rescue Slough from the despond into which it has fallen thanks to his predecessor, the late Sir John Betjeman.

Sir John doomed the town to 60 years of ignominy with his poem: *Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough*.

It isn't fit for humans now... To undo the damage, the Berkshire town (pop. 110,000 approx) is asking Mr Hughes to write a nice and equally memorable poem about its modern role as the home of Dulux

paint, Horlicks, Mars bars and Cellnet.

Admittedly it may be short of horses and Yorkshire crows, two of the themes of the poet's heyday. But it can boast of being the birthplace of Elton John's Horse Embrocation and the Cox's Pippin, its historic worthies include a Betjemanesque figure, the Victorian astronomer William Herschel, who employed 25 men to build a 40 ft telescope in his Slough back garden.

The commission — in which the laureate has yet to reply — comes from Fiona Macgarratt, the town's Labour MP. Yesterday she said: "Everybody in Slough is fed up with the constant jibes about it



being an eyesore. Its history and its contribution to modern life and the world is undermined by the fact someone once asked a bomb to come and drop on it."

Sir John wrote in 1937 when Slough was known as "Little Wales" because of the influx generated by a trading estate, creating a new urban life. He wrote:

Come bombs and blow to smithereens those air-conditioned bright cantons. Tinned fruit, tinned meat, tinned milk, tinned beans, tinned minds, tinned breath.

A council official said: "The big thing about us today is our multicultural nature. We're rather like a London borough — but outside London."

Slough now take a bow

In the absence of any immediate response from Ted Hughes, the Guardian asked the poet John Hegley to defend Slough:

They slur it although it's a wow said the honourable member for Slough and she wrote off to Ted with the Laureate head and said could you use verse to avow that it may not be highbrow or quaint but it turns out good chocolate and paint; now she may have a point in defending the joint, let's be honest though, Luton it ain't.

The original

Extracts from John Betjeman's eulogy to Slough:

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough It isn't fit for humans now, There isn't grass to graze a cow Swarm over, Death!...

In labour-saving homes, with care Their wives frizz out peroxide hair And dry it in synthetic air And paint their nails...

Irishman accuses Halifax of racial discrimination

Clare Longrigg

AN Irishman yesterday accused the Halifax Building Society of racial discrimination after he was rejected for a job at a branch in Kensington, west London.

Mark Ferguson, 30, told a tribunal that at his job interview he had been asked irrelevant and patronising questions about being Irish. He was told he "did not fit the branch" in High Street.

Mr Ferguson, a Protestant from Co Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, came to London in 1994.

He said that at his interview in May 1996, Nicholas Garland, the Halifax branch manager, spent 13 minutes asking him questions such as: "What was it like growing up with the Troubles? Tell me about life in Ireland? Do you go home to Ireland often? Do you live with Irish people?"

Mr Ferguson told the tribunal in Bloomsbury, Central

London: "After two minutes I felt like walking out of the room, but I wanted the job. I tried to remain calm and answered the questions as best I could. I think they should not have been asked of me. They were totally irrelevant to the position."

He added: "I have been to many interviews since leaving school, but I have never experienced anything like this."

In January 1996, Mr Ferguson had started work for the Halifax on a temporary contract doing clerical work, during preparations for the change from building society to bank. He said he found the work boring and applied for a permanent job as a cashier. He passed an aptitude test and a 90-minute interview with a personnel manager before being sent for interview at the Kensington branch.

Ann O'Brien, for the Halifax, said Mr Ferguson had scored poorly in an accuracy test. He only received an interview in "misguided kindness".

The hearing continues.

Smith puts everyone in digital picture

Kamal Ahmed Media Correspondent

THE Government took the first tentative steps yesterday towards solving one of the most difficult questions television has faced — how to ensure that the launch of digital television does not create an underclass of viewers unable to buy the new technology.

In a consultation document, Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for Culture, said that he wanted a wide public debate about the new technology, which will eventually make present televisions obsolete.

He said that although the Government would not force anybody to buy the new set-top boxes and digital televisions essential to receive the new services, it wanted to see the eventual end of the analogue system, which brings TV to more than 99 per cent of households in Britain.

Although it was too early to deal conclusively with what has become known as "the Aunt Emily problem", he was aware of its seriousness.

The Government is concerned that although those interested in technology will quickly take to digital television, many of the public, typified by the "Aunt Emily" character, will stick with their old televisions.

Some will not be able to afford the new technology, creating a new "television underclass", and some will not be interested in it.

If too many of those

Countdown

Summer 1998: BSkyB launches first digital television services. First set-top boxes, essential for digital reception, go on the market at subsidised price of £200. Aunt Emily watches her analogue television.

Late 1998: British Digital Broadcasting, owned by Granada Group and Carlton and involving the BBC, launches rival digital service. Aunt Emily sees adverts for BDB, and ignores them.

2000: First digital TVs come on to the market. Pick-up among households increases, although the sets are up to £1,000 more

expensive than analogue versions. Aunt Emily's daughter buys digital television. Aunt Emily is shocked at the price.

2001: Digital pick-up poor. Government, pressurised to re-invigorate market, announces 12-year cut-off date for all analogue TVs. Aunt Emily reads press coverage but does not realise her television is analogue.

2006: Analogue sets now have warning sticker, saying they will be obsolete in seven years' time. Nearly 40 per cent of households now have digital TVs, with access to home shopping, the Internet and hundreds of TV services and channels. Manufacturers announce they are

pulling out of the analogue market. Aunt Emily does not think she needs to change her television. "There is nothing wrong with it," she says.

2011: Price of digital TV sets comes down to that of analogue. Government offers voucher scheme for anyone who has not bought into digital. Voucher is available through benefits and pensions, and 85 per cent of households now have digital. Aunt Emily most enjoys Coronation Street, which is still on analogue. "What's the hurry?" she asks.

2013: Government switches off analogue signal. Aunt Emily, and thousands like her, now have TV sets that no longer work.

remained at the time the analogue signal was switched off there would be political uproar and the Government would find itself accused of denying television to some voters.

Mr Smith said that original proposals to shut down the analogue frequencies in as little as five years were impractical and said that the Government was now going to consult on naming a switch-off date in 10 or 15 years' time.

"I believe that the attractive additional services likely to be offered by the established broadcasters such as the BBC and ITV, coupled with the advent of wide screen pictures and CD-quality sound, will encourage the public to invest in digital receiving equipment."

In the document, the Government said that it would not sanction ending the analogue system until most people had access to digital equipment.

The Institute of Public Policy Research has already

flagged the problem of the "television underclass". In a report last month it said that the Government should consider a voucher scheme for those on benefits or pensioners to enable poorer viewers to buy the new technology.

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The Guardian INTERACTIVE

As the World Cup draws near, his rhetoric is starting to make Professor Unwin's gobbledegook sound like the lucid logic of Sir Norman Birkett.

David Lacey on Glenn Hoddle

Sport98, page 4

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Tobacco victims win first battle

Lawyers not liable for costs if no-win, no-fee actions fail

Clare Dyer
Legal Correspondent

LUNG cancer victims won their first battle yesterday in their fight for compensation against tobacco companies, after the Court of Appeal removed an obstacle which threatened to derail them.

The court reassured lawyers they will not be liable for huge legal costs if they lose, confirming that lawyers who lose cases brought under no-win no-fee deals are no more at risk of having to pay their winning opponents' costs than those funded by legal aid or clients paying privately.

Claimants' lawyers feared they would have to pull out after the companies, Imperial Tobacco and Gallaher (indicated they might seek costs against them personally if

they lost, and the High Court refused an order protecting them.

The case is the first on the ramifications of no-win no-fee deals — so-called conditional fee agreements — to reach the courts.

Mr Justice Popplewell's refusal in the High Court last October to rule out personal cost orders against law firms and barristers had threatened to throw government plans for a big extension of no-win no-fee litigation into disarray.

Lawyers for the cigarette manufacturers had suggested the ex-smokers' lawyers were the prime movers behind the case and should face having to pay the costs — which could total £10 million — if they lost.

The appeal court upheld Mr Justice Popplewell's decision to refuse "advance immunity" from cost orders, but reassured the lawyers that this was not necessary. The fact that they were acting under conditional fee agreements — allowing them up to double their usual fees if they won, with a ceiling of 25 per cent of damages but nothing if they lose — put them at no special risk.

Martyn Day, senior partner of Leigh, Day and Co, one of two firms banding the claims, issued writs yesterday for nine new claimants, bringing the total number to 50. He said: "The cloud the defendants have put over us in this case has been dispelled by this judgment."



Lung cancer victim Ernest Jones (centre), with solicitors Martin Day (left) and John Pickering, outside the High Court after their victory yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER JORDAN

whole future of conditional fees would have been undermined."

One plaintiff, Ernest Jones, 76, from Croydon, said: "I'm very grateful to Mr Day and his colleagues." He started smoking at 13 and smoked up to 40 a day until 1988, six months before he was diagnosed with cancer and given 12 months to live. He has undergone 35 operations.

The Master of the Rolls, Lord Woolf, and lords Justice Aldous and Chadwick, also lifted a gagging order imposed by Mr Justice Popplewell on the opposing legal teams speaking to the media. "We are quite satisfied that it was wrong to make this order," they said.

Preliminary hearings in the case were held in chambers, with the press and public excluded, and the judge imposed a broad gagging order at the tobacco companies' request.

In an important ruling for press freedom, the judge said: "In litigation of this sort it is difficult if not impossible for the court to seek to prevent direct or indirect communication with the media. In our judgment in this case the court should not have attempted to do so."

They stressed that cases were usually heard in chambers for administrative convenience and that what happened there was not confidential or secret, with few exceptions.

Judges should allow the public into chambers when practical and if not, should consider adjourning into open court or allowing press representatives into chambers.

Courts should be as open as possible.

Clive Bates, director of the anti-smoking group ASH, said: "Lung cancer sufferers can still join the case and this will improve the chances of success and give strength to those already fighting. Smokers or ex-smokers who want to join the action can contact ASH for information on how to go about it."

Over 40 per cent of males aged 16-24 now smoke, according to the campaign. Dr Macara said organisations like his might be part of the problem. "I fear there is an element of anti-authoritarianism — it is a kind of youth rebellion against common sense."

Meanwhile, a study published today indicates that children who eat less than their peers may be less at risk of developing certain cancers when they grow up.

The findings, published in this week's British Medical Journal, are in line with studies which have conclusively shown that animals given less calories develop fewer cancers and live longer. Evidence from Japan has also associated low calorie intake and small stature with long life.

Cancer overtakes heart disease as biggest killer

Sarah Bosley

CANCER is now Britain's biggest killer, thanks to the successes of science in combating heart disease, the Cancer Research Campaign said yesterday.

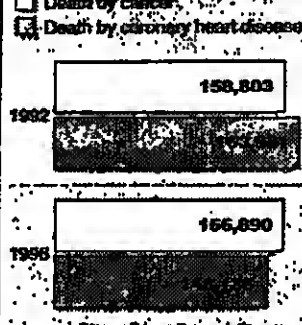
Last year nearly 9,000 more people died of cancer than of heart disease, which used to be the bigger killer. Death rates for both types of illness have been dropping, but since many people have opted for healthier diets, cancer has become the more difficult to combat.

The campaign and the British Medical Association hit out yesterday at the biggest problem — tobacco. At the launch of the campaign's website, which it hopes will prove attractive to young people who smoke or might be tempted to smoke, its director general, Gordon McVie, said: "If we are to see the cancer death rate plummet at the same speed as heart disease we need to cut down the one in four of us in this country who smoke."

Sandy Macara, chairman of the BMA, said he was "baffled" over how to get the message across to young people. We were in the middle

Killer diseases

Deaths by cancer and heart disease



Source: Cancer Research Campaign

of a new smoking epidemic among youngsters, he said.

"We need a crusade for health to protect young people who are vulnerable because they cannot look ahead and to offset the insidious advertising by the tobacco manufacturers."

"We have got to target the whole tobacco industry as public enemy number one in our country. We need to do everything we can to kill it — because it is the killer. The death rates for cancer are not falling at the rate that they should because people are continuing to smoke."

Stephen Franklin and colleagues at the Department of Social Medicine, University of Bristol, traced nearly 4,000 people whose food intake had been recorded in childhood during a survey of family diet and health in the late 1950s.

They found that, allowing for other factors such as poverty, children who ate more within the normal dietary range were more likely to have cancers — except for smoking-related cancers.

Palace dismisses claim by Al Fayed of conspiracy

Jon Henley in Paris and Stuart Miller

MOHAMED AL Fayed was yesterday accused of upsetting princes William and Harry, as officials on both sides of the Channel issued denials. The claim that the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, was the result of a conspiracy.

In an interview with the Mirror newspaper published yesterday, the Harrods' owner said he was "99.9 per cent certain" that the crash in the Pont de l'Alma underpass in Paris on August 31 which killed Diana and her son, Dodi, was "no accident".

The claim was rejected by both Kensington Palace and French police investigating the crash.

In London, a spokeswoman for the princess's office said: "We have no comment on the article, but this continued speculation is both unhelpful and upsetting to the family."

French justice officials said they sympathised with, but could not accept, Mr Al Fayed's claims.

"You can see absolutely why he believes this and why he has to say it," said one justice source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"He has lost his son, and perhaps a very famous future. But nothing in the investigation has uncovered even the faintest shadow of a conspiracy."

Officials also cast doubt on Mr Al Fayed's insistence that

Diana had uttered her last words to a nurse at the Pitié Salpêtrière hospital.

Mr Al Fayed said last year he had been told the words by a nurse, whom he named. The hospital at that time denied that any nurse of the same name worked there, adding that one nurse with the same surname was on its books but did not work in the emergency ward and would have had "no reason to be anywhere near" Diana.

In his latest account, Mr Al Fayed said the nurse had covered her name badge while speaking to him to conceal her identity.

"I've said this before. It is untrue that Diana said anything at the hospital," said a spokesman, Thierry Merveau, and most expensive investigation of a traffic accident in French history," he said. "The instructions from the start have been to pursue every single clue."

Two investigating magistrates, Hervé Stephan and Marie-Christine Devidal, have been working exclusively on the case for nearly six months, putting more than 100 other ongoing investigations on hold, another justice source said.

"This is already the longest and most expensive investigation of a traffic accident in French history," he said. "The instructions from the start have been to pursue every single clue."

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Classroom union gives cautious welcome as PM acts to honour manifesto pledge by allocating funds to recruit extra infant teachers

Blair puts £22m into class size cuts

John Carvel
Education Editor

TONY Blair yesterday launched the first stage of the Government's programme to cut class sizes by allocating £22 million for the recruitment of extra infant teachers.

On a visit to Rosetta primary school in Canning Town, east London, he said the money would benefit nearly 125,000 children who will no longer start the next school year in September in classes of more than 30.

One of the main education pledges in Labour's election manifesto was to set a maximum of 30 for all infant classes by 2001. Ministers estimate there are about 500,000 such children in classes

above that limit, and have asked local education authorities to develop plans to reorganise primary schools to eliminate the problem.

The first tranche of money allocated yesterday will go to 65 of the 130 authorities in England which came forward with the most practical proposals for early action.

But they did not include some of the worst overcrowding hotspots. Officials in London borough of Kings- ton — where a record 74 per cent of five to seven-year-olds are in classes over 30 — said they could not solve the problem without a big investment in new classrooms.

Mr Blair's announcement was welcomed by the teacher unions. David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "The sooner we can reduce the classes for all infant children the better."

But he warned that ministers would find it difficult to deliver their pledge in full. "Reducing class sizes is essential if all children are to have access to the teaching support they need in their crucial early years, when they master the basics of literacy and numeracy," he said.

The class size pledge is being funded from savings on the assisted places scheme, which offered subsidised places for poorer children at independent schools. By phasing the scheme out, the Government expects to generate £100 million for infant classes by 2001.

The 65 authorities in the vanguard of the programme were being given 100 per cent funding to recruit extra teachers in schools with room for extra classes. But there would be a "gross waste of resources" if heads were made to split classes of 31 or 32 pupils and build extra classrooms to accommodate them.

The Local Government Association forecast enormous practical problems for overcrowded schools on sites without room for expansion. Areas with clusters of small village primaries which were all slightly overcrowded might not be able to let parents have their first choice of school if they had to keep within a strict ceiling on class numbers.

Mr Blunkett said: "If we wanted to simply shuffle children around the system and prevent classes rising over 30,

we wouldn't have to allocate the additional £100 million by 2001. Far from precluding the preference of parents, I think this will actually help them."

Stephen Dorrell, the shadow education secretary, said the money was a drop in the ocean compared to cuts in the education budget in many areas. "Of course if there are no other choices... then smaller classes are better than bigger sizes. In the real world I think the response to this will be quite underwhelming in schools around Britain."

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, said the Government should reduce all primary class sizes. By sticking to Tory spending plans it was abandoning children aged seven to 11 to another three years of oversized classes and inadequate education.

Warning of problems amid delight over top cash award

PRIMARY school head teachers in Derbyshire were last night celebrating the county's success in having been awarded £1,160,000 — the biggest of the grants made to local authorities for reducing infant class sizes, writes John Carvel.

For Eileen Lythgoe, head teacher at the 119-pupil Padfield primary school in Glossop, the money can provide a simple answer to overcrowding. She has 41 children aged from four to six in a single entry class looked after by

one member of staff. By recruiting a second teacher and splitting the class, she can meet the Government's objectives without causing disruption for the older children.

One of the infant classes will probably use the school hall in the morning for the new regime of literacy and numeracy hours. When older children need the hall in the afternoon for PE, drama, dance and music, the two infant classes can share one of the existing classrooms.

Even if the county funded a second extra teacher, there would not be room for a second extra class without using the school hall.

That would effectively eliminate assemblies, drama, PE and other parts of the national curriculum. "The Government has a laudable aim. The problem is putting it into practice," he said.

James Lawson had threatened women with swordsticks, had convictions for assault and other crimes, and was a police informer. Dozens of people had reasons to write his name on a bullet



'The police who came to see me said everyone they've spoken to said "It wasn't me but I'm not sorry". That's the way I feel'

Donna Cannon (left) on the murder of James Lawson (above)

PHOTOGRAPH (left) RICHARD OLIVER

Duncan Campbell
Crime Correspondent

THE police informer shot dead by a hitman in Hampshire this week liked to boast that there was a bullet with his name on it. The problem for police investigating the murder is that dozens of people had very good reasons to inscribe it.

"The police who came to see me today said everyone they've spoken to said: 'It wasn't me but I'm not sorry,'" said Donna Cannon. "That's the way I feel." James Lawson, aged 40, had harassed and threatened her and given evidence against her in a blackmail case.

Lawson had threatened women with guns, knives and swordsticks, underpaid the prostitutes he hired, but liked to say he had only given evi-

dence as a public service. He often boasted he could not be touched because he was a "protected witness".

Lawson, previously known as Peter McNeil, was shot in the head with a pistol after answering the door at his home in Hook, Hampshire, on Tuesday night. In 1988 he had given evidence which led to the conviction at the Old Bailey of three men involved in a cocaine conspiracy who received jail sentences of between 10 and 18 years.

He changed his name and moved to Hook, but made no secret of the fact that he had been a police informer. He was often accompanied on drinking trips by burly minders and had a reputation as a big spender.

Det Supt Joe Edwards of Hampshire police said yesterday Lawson often told people about his past.

"Was this a contract killing by a professional hitman? I cannot say until we know who was responsible," he said. "It's an unusual method of killing in a Hampshire village, certainly." Lawson's role as an informer would be examined, but people should not jump to conclusions.

Lawson, a car dealer, was at home with an associate, Sven Hamer, at the time of the shooting. Police believe he answered the door to his thick-set killer who fled on a motorbike, the favourite mode of transport for hitmen. Lawson died shortly after being taken to hospital. His girlfriend was not in the house at the time.

In 1992 Ms Cannon, now 28, was running an escort agency in Farnham, Surrey, when Lawson hired one of the women on her books. The woman returned from the ap-

pointment hysterical, saying he had threatened her with a gun, a knife and swordstick. The police were called but no gun was found.

Although Lawson was put on the agency's blacklist, another woman went to his house when he used a different name. She complained

that he refused to pay her the agreed fee.

Lawson later telephoned Ms Cannon and recorded the conversation. She was accused of blackmailing him by threatening to accuse him of rape. Lawson gave evidence against her at a subsequent trial. She was convicted

and given a community service sentence. The jury was not told he had a history as an informer.

Lawson also had convictions for assault, criminal damage, attempted burglary and driving offences.

Yesterday Ms Cannon, who now works as a drugs coun-

sellor, said she had been visited by detectives investigating the murder. She had been eliminated from inquiries, she said: "I'm not thick-set and I don't ride a motorbike!"

She said Lawson had countless enemies and she believed people would have been queuing up to kill him.

Lawson had once rung the Guardian to say he had only become an informer because he was public spirited. He was not a paid police informer, he said, but had assisted the authorities on a number of cases because of his distaste for the IRA and drug dealers.

Arrest of bank robber in 1970 marked start of use of the 'supergrass' to solve cases

SINCE the London bank robber Bertie Smalls was arrested in 1970 and became a "supergrass", informing on 21 of his former colleagues, the protection of informers and witnesses has been an increasingly high priority for police forces, writes Duncan Campbell.

Detectives rely extensively on intelligence gained from informers, and have to be able to assure them they will be protected.

In 1989 the body of informer Alan "Chalky" White was found in a lake at Cotswold Water Park in Gloucestershire.

He had been stabbed to death and wrapped in a tarpaulin. A man against whom he was due to give evidence,

Danny Gardiner, was convicted of his murder.

Two years later Dave Norris, another informer, was shot dead outside his front door in Belvedere, south-east London, by two men.

But White and Norris are exceptions. Despite the increasing tendency among criminals to inform on each other, there have been few revenge attacks, partly because informers have been given new identities and even sent abroad to Canada or Australia, and partly because there is a realisation that informing is now part of a criminal's portfolio — the days of "honour among thieves" have long gone.

The police provide protection for two types of witness: professional criminals who have turned informers, and innocent members of the public who have witnessed a crime and been threatened against giving evidence.

In both cases new identities can be arranged and in extreme cases the informers will be assisted to go abroad. The new identities have to be arranged with the assistance of the social services and local authorities, as full identities require new records. If an informer is seen to be under threat, he may be rehoused.

Some witnesses have complained that once they have given evidence they are not given the support they need. One man told the Guardian he had been moved to a much worse house than he had been living in and was not properly rehoused once the trial of his assailant had finished.

Detectives say some people offer themselves as informers in the hope of being rehoused in much grander style. "You have to make sure their new place is neither any worse nor too much better than their last place."

Informers or witnesses at risk are often given alarms connected to the nearest police station. Some get bored away from their old haunts and cannot resist returning to see friends or relatives.

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Iraq crisis



A party of Iraqi schoolchildren files towards the monument to the martyrs in Baghdad yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: ENRIC MARTI

Jordan faces rising anger

Julian Borger in Amman

AS THE Iraqi crisis showed signs of spreading instability through the region, Jordan's Islamist-led opposition is threatening to stage a march today in defiance of a government ban on demonstrations in support of Iraq.

The Jordanian prime minister, Abdul Salam al-Majali, met opposition leaders from the National Popular Committee in Defence of Iraq but, the organisation said, he failed to persuade it to halt the demonstration, which is due to begin as Muslims leave the Grand Hussein mosque in Amman after prayers.

The government, fearful of a wave of anti-Western anger,

has banned all pro-Iraqi meetings earlier in the week and has said it will use "all available measures" to suppress unrest.

The national committee, established to give moral support to Baghdad in its showdown with the United States and Britain over United Nations weapons inspections, comprises 14 Islamist and Arab nationalist parties, unions and civic groups.

Its spokesman, Suleiman Arrar, said the march would be orderly, without slogans or banners. He said: "The procession is not going to liberate Iraq but we feel it's our duty to express the feelings on the Arab streets that Iraq is being hit and so Arab is raising his voice."

Across the River Jordan, on the West Bank, Palestinian

Britain draws flak from MEPs

THE British Government is bracing itself for heavy criticism from the European Parliament next week for its willingness to consider military action against Iraq and failure to consult other European Union members, writes Stephen Bates in Brussels.

With the Parliament's session likely to coincide with the countdown to a decision on military intervention, hard-line MEPs, including British Labour members, are demanding that action should only be taken with United Nations Security Council backing.

students defied a ban on demonstrations imposed by their own leaders yesterday. About 300 marched in the town of Hebron in support of Saddam Hussein, burning US flags, throwing stones at Israeli soldiers and chanting "Beloved Saddam, strike Tel Aviv".

Jordanian government officials say they are deeply con-

cerned about the possible regional repercussions of a military strike on Iraq. An official of the royal palace said it was feared that a wave of Iraqi refugees would move westwards if President Saddam's regime began to fall apart.

More than 1.5 million Iraqis fled to Jordan during the 1991

Gulf war. This time Jordanian officials are making contingency plans for the arrival of up to 500,000. Troops have been moved to the border to prevent an influx.

Jordanian political analysts said the threat of internal instability would rise considerably in the event of US-British air strikes.

Hanana Mansour, a spokesman for the Islamic Action Front, the main opposition group, which boycotted last year's parliamentary elections, said the government would not be able to control popular outrage.

"No free Arab will be able to remain silent... There will be no one safe in this region, especially those governments who fail to support Iraq," he said.

Hassan al-Anbari, a former

Iraqi diplomat now teaching in Amman, said America was indifferent to Arab public opinion.

He doubted Jordan would be able to prevent a wave of refugees crossing the border. "You may be able to stop legal crossing. But during a war, the concept of legality disappears. Are you going to shoot them?" he said.

The Iraqi foreign minister, Mohammed Saeed el-Sahaf, was due in Jordan last night as part of a Middle East tour designed to rally Arab opinion. Before leaving Cairo he said the door to a diplomatic solution was still open.

But he said that if the US went ahead with military action it should appreciate "the dire consequences not only to the region and to Iraq, but also to them".

In Stormin' Norman's desert boots

Martin Kettle in Washington on the quiet military planner who would lead any new campaign against Saddam

IF THE United States launches Gulf war II against Iraq in the coming days and weeks, then the role played by "Stormin' Norman" Schwarzkopf the first time around will this time be played by another close-cropped, square-jawed military man straight from central casting, General Tony Zinni.

Gen Zinni holds Gen Schwarzkopf's old job as chief of the US military's Central Command, Centcom, as the command is known, is permanently based at MacDill Air Force Base outside Tampa, Florida, but it has nothing to do with the Caribbean or the Americas. It is the hub of US planning for any military engagement in a sector of the globe, which describes an arc from Kenya through the Middle East and into Pakistan.

Gen Zinni, aged 54, has been head of Centcom only since 1997, but he is one of America's most experienced soldiers. He served and was wounded in Vietnam, where he won the Purple Heart. More recently he has emerged as a master military planner in some of the most difficult peacekeeping operations undertaken by the US. These include protecting Kurds in northern Iraq after the Gulf war, later trying to maintain order among the rival armed forces in Somalia in 1992 and 1993, and supervising the American withdrawal from the African country two years later.

Lacking Gen Schwarzkopf's panache and flair for public relations, Gen Zinni is a more traditional, quiet military man. He may have been tested under enemy fire but he has yet to win his spurs in combat with the media.

In a rare press briefing in November, however, Gen Zinni gave a faultless performance in which he spoke movingly of his first-hand experience of the effects of the Iraqi weapons which he may soon be ordered to destroy.

"I've seen the results of his handwork first hand," the general recalled of his seven months in northern Iraq after the ceasefire with Saddam Hussein in 1991.

"It's sickening. And it seems to me that he has little value for human life. And if it's a question of being in power, I think he'd resort to any act."

"I went into the Kurdish villages that were gassed," Gen Zinni said. "I went to the villages where no stone stood upon stone and the villagers

told me that five times the villages were destroyed."

On that occasion, after the last stand-off with Iraq, Gen Zinni warned that President Saddam's airforce, which would take the brunt of any action now, was "still capable" and that his air defence systems were "pretty robust". But he said the US would be well capable of responding "in a serious way".

Gen Zinni, who grew up in Pennsylvania, graduated from Villanova University in 1965 with an economics degree before being commissioned as a second lieutenant in the marines. Two years later he was ordered on the first of two tours of duty in Vietnam.



General Zinni: military man straight from central casting

where he was wounded while serving as a marine company commander in 1970.

Gen Zinni spent much of the next two decades working his way up through the ranks of the marines in a variety of command and administrative posts. He has a masters degree in international relations, and is particularly experienced in leading disaster relief and emergency aid missions, which he did in Japan in 1987 and the Philippines in 1989.

● Six F-16 fighter jets left the US for the Gulf yesterday as a package of 19 bombers and attack jets began moving to join the American military force poised near Iraq. Six B-52 bombers and one swing-wing B-1 bomber were scheduled to leave Louisiana and South Dakota later in the day. Six F-117A stealth fighters will depart New Mexico early today for the Gulf.

SMALL CHANGE



With effect from 28 February 1998 the old, larger, heavier 50 pence coins will be withdrawn from circulation.

ROYAL MINT

Scud gets a cheer from the sidelines

Its old and crude but beats the US Patriot, a Moscow scientist tells James Meek

THEY ARE Saddam Hussein's most feared weapons, the elusive, mobile Scud missiles which panicked the Middle East in 1991 and which lurk, unnumbered with perhaps the most evil of payloads, in the desert byways of Iraq.

They were Rem Kanin's pride and joy. Even now there is nothing like a mention of the Scud on the evening news to put a spring in the missile scientist's step.

Mr Kanin, aged 62, is one of the dwindling band of then Soviet engineers who helped design the Scud-B missile supplied to Iraq and many other "regime regimes" — North Korea, Libya, Iran and Syria.

"The last time I saw the rocket it was in Afghanistan," he said. "I was lying there watching the TV news and there it was."

The Scud, no longer used by the Russian army, has been heavily modified by clients like the Iraqis and the North Koreans. But it is still essentially the simple missile masterminded by Mr Kanin's former boss Victor Makeyev.

"Here you have this rocket designed at the end of the 1950s, it's 35ft long, it doesn't have a detachable warhead and the most basic of radars can see where it's going," Mr Kanin said. "Yet it's clear the US Patriot doesn't work so well against the old lady."

Mr Kanin still works at the former Scud design office in Miss, near Chelyabinsk, previously known only by the code name SKB-385 and now named after Makeyev. The office has long since abandoned the Scud in favour of intercontinental ballistic missiles for Russia's nuclear submarines, but the old guard still listens for media mentions of their baby doing well abroad.

"There's a sense of satisfaction," said Mr Kanin, a stocky, fastidious man with a goatee. "Even when they ascribe the Scud to someone else instead of us."

The Scud-B was assembled far from the design office, in another part of Russia. "Scud" is not the Russian name of the rocket but its Nato code name, although even the Russian media has taken to calling it "Scud" instead of its Russian code, R-17. Mr Kanin said he was not offended.

"The main thing is that fame arrived. And the fact that fame arrived when the rocket was entering its fourth decade of active service overcomes any possible offence," he said.

The Scud is a distant descendant of the first Soviet rocket, the R-1. Like the Americans, the first Soviet rocket engineers worked with German scientists to copy the V-2 rocket which Hitler used against London. United States rocket engineers defended themselves against criticism of Russia's early lead in the missile stakes by saying, "Their Germans are better than ours." Mr Kanin disagreed: "I heard the best Germans went to America."

How many professors does it take to change a policy? If they are German professors of economics, it appears more than 155. Isabel Hilton

Comment, page 13

URGENT APPEAL

EARTHQUAKE IN AFGHANISTAN

Last week an earthquake killed over 4000 people in the Takhar Province of Afghanistan. Today thousands more are suffering in sub-zero temperatures - without shelter, warmth, medical supplies or clean water.

Despite the terrain, weather, and on-going civil war, a Red Cross land convoy and two Red Cross flights have already arrived in the region. But additional supplies are desperately needed to prevent further loss of life.

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Suharto orders army to quash riots

John Aglionby in Jakarta

PRESIDENT Suharto ordered the Indonesian army to act ruthlessly and decisively against rioters in the run-up to the indirect presidential election on March 10.

Speaking as his supreme commander, he told the forces that they "should take firm action without hesitation towards whatever and whom ever violates the law".

His call came as hundreds of people rioted in the west Java town of Jatiwangi, setting fire to shops in protest at rising prices.

President Suharto told the forces at their annual strategy meeting to focus on "certain parties" using the upheaval resulting from months of economic chaos to "achieve their political objectives, which have not been achieved yet through democratic and constitutional means".

He also ordered the reactivation of military alert posts created before last year's general election.

President Suharto, once a Javanese peasant farmer, has ruled Indonesia for 32 years and is guaranteed re-election for a seventh successive term of office since he personally vetted the 1,000 members of the electoral college.

As the economic crisis seeds the price of basic commodities soaring, unrest has become a daily occurrence. Yesterday hundreds of pedicab drivers ran amok after demonstrating against rising tyre prices.

"The rioting is starting to gather a momentum of its own," a political analyst said last night as fresh violence was reported near the west Java city of Cirebon. "It can spread very quickly, particularly as everyone is suffering at the moment and no one is being spared."

Most observers believe the chaos will continue. An international banker said yesterday: "The economy is completely rudderless at the moment and, until someone gets a grip, Indonesia is going to continue to meander aimlessly through the economic wasteland. The result can only be more violence."

According to the sociologist Loekman Sutrisno, President Suharto's problem is that he cannot admit its own inadequacies. "Statements blaming subversives sound great but only expose the reality of the regime. He cannot accept that he has failed and is blaming anyone and everyone for his mistakes."

There is little hope of change. Amien Rais, a Muslim scholar, and Megawati Sukarnoputri, former leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party, have offered to stand for the presidency but are outside Indonesia's claustraphobic and tightly controlled



President Suharto, surrounded by Indonesia's senior military officers, in Jakarta yesterday. PHOTOGRAPH: BBNY NURAHEN

political system and so stand no chance of success. The only option for many is to rely on the younger officers who took over senior military positions yesterday. They include General Wiranto, aged 50, who became commander-in-chief, and President Suharto's son-in-law Major-General Prabowo Subianto.

"More than anything [the military] is interested in maintaining national stability," Dr Sutrisno said. "It has its vast business interests to protect and has no desire to see these threatened in any way. Many people take heart from this."

The military still has a reputation for ruthless repression, although Gen Wiranto is thought to be trying to change that. During an exercise in central Jakarta last week he said: "Protecting the nation is as much the role of the public as the armed forces. I would like to see people taking more responsibility than has been the case in the past."

The difference now, Dr Sutrisno says, is that military families are starting to get hungry — "and having

hungry soldiers could lead to a very dangerous state of affairs". Although Gen Wiranto and his colleagues are confirmed Suharto loyalists, they would tell him to resign if that became the only way to protect their own interests and end the crisis, Dr Sutrisno added.

That was unlikely to happen before the election, but if the economic turmoil continued, he said, "I can see the forces telling him he must step down".

"Our politicians have always had lots of affairs, but it is very rare for them to explode in public like this," said Pan Tzu-yin, director of news at TVBS, an independent television channel. "From now on, public figures in Taiwan will have to take more care."

The furor began with an attack on one of Taiwan's rising political stars, Huang Yi-chiao, by Clara Chou, a talk-show host and biographer. Ms Chou announced on air that she had had a long affair with a government spokesman, and had been forced to have an abortion.

She added the spokesman had indulged in a parallel affair with a friend of one of Taiwan's best-known celebrities. She claimed that this relationship too ended with an abortion.

Mr Huang, the divorced Lothario in the alleged triangle, issued a mealy-mouthed denial and was sacked as a government spokesman.

Communists have woven elaborate conspiracy theories, suggesting a campaign

to undermine his boss, James Soong, who plans to run for president. A soothsayer, Lin Chen-yi, has declared that the recently begun Year of the Tiger is governed by a "peach blossom star" — an alignment of the heavens said to stir lust.

Whatever the explanation, the Taiwanese media's excesses seem to stem from the country's young and boisterous democracy. Until 1987 all the media was controlled by the Kuomintang, the party that fled to the island after losing

Clinton plans rise in minimum wage to woo voters

Martin Kettle in Washington

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton signalled a four-hour increase in the statutory minimum wage over the next two years yesterday as part of a vote-catching programme to win back Democratic Party control of Congress in the autumn mid-term elections.

Though the precise details of his proposal have yet to be worked out, Mr Clinton told a meeting of party leaders that the booming economy could afford the second rise in the minimum wage in less than a year without threatening other spending plans. The increase will take the official hourly rate to \$6.15 (\$3.75) by the end of 1998.

The rise is likely to be introduced in two stages, though the legislation will have to go through the Congress this session.

The proposal is a compromise between the \$1.50-an-hour increase by September 2000 urged by Senator Edward Kennedy and other liberal Democrats and the opposition of the Republicans, who control Congress, to any increase.

It is the latest in a series of measures appealing to traditional Democratic voters which the administration sees as central to its strategy for saving Mr Clinton's presidency from being trapped or destroyed by the Monica Lewinsky case.

There is a growing expectation in the White House and among congressional Republicans that the independent prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, will not bring criminal charges against Mr Clinton when he finished investigating whether the president and Ms Lewinsky lied on oath about a sexual relationship. Mr Starr is thought more likely to present his evidence to the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, so that possible impeachment proceedings could begin against Mr Clinton.

At a private two-day meeting in Virginia this week Republicans are understood to have agreed to make no more public attacks on Mr Clinton for the Lewinsky affair, so as not to provide ammunition for charges of bias if impeachment proceedings begin. The Republican House Speaker, Newt Gingrich, told reporters yesterday: "I have

no comment at all on that entire zone, and we'll cheerfully repeat that phrase as often as you all want to ask the question."

Some observers believe the proceedings could drag on throughout the mid-term election campaign to maximise the embarrassment to the president, without reaching a conclusion.

If that is the case, then Mr Clinton's interest in ensuring a Democratic victory in November, and winning back control of the Congress before an impeachment bill is completed, could hardly be greater.

In Washington yesterday Mr Starr subpoenaed a former White House secret service officer, Lewis Fox, to give evidence before the grand jury which is considering the case against Mr Clinton.

Mr Fox, who has said he stood guard outside the Oval Office while Mr Clinton and Ms Lewinsky were alone inside, made a brief visit to the courthouse before leaving without comment.

It was unclear whether he gave evidence or — like a number of secret service agents whom Mr Starr wishes to interview — declined.

Zippergate looks like apple pie against peach scandal

Andrew Higgins in Taipei on a salacious saga of sexual goings-on in high places

IF HILLARY Clinton thinks the furor aroused by her husband's appeal to Taiwan's best-known celebrities is a uniquely American feeding frenzy she should take a peek at pages one, three, four, five, seven and 11 of Taiwan's best-selling daily newspaper, the China Times.

Each page, and hours of television and radio, is dedicated to Taiwan's own drama of sex in high places: an alleged love-triangle that makes Monica Lewinsky's supposed relationship with President Clinton seem like apple pie.

The saga is known coyly in Chinese as a "peach scandal". But Confucian propriety has been swept aside by a flood of salacious media coverage.

"Our politicians have always had lots of affairs, but it is very rare for them to explode in public like this," said Pan Tzu-yin, director of news at TVBS, an independent television channel. "From now on, public figures in Taiwan will have to take more care."

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to undermine his boss, James Soong, who plans to run for president. A soothsayer, Lin Chen-yi, has declared that the recently begun Year of the Tiger is governed by a "peach blossom star" — an alignment of the heavens said to stir lust.

Whatever the explanation, the Taiwanese media's excesses seem to stem from the country's young and boisterous democracy. Until 1987 all the media was controlled by the Kuomintang, the party that fled to the island after losing

China's civil war in 1949. Now, in the hands of three television channels controlled by the Kuomintang, there are dozens, some offering Japanese pornography, American wrestling, and sermons by quirky religious groups.

The love-triangle episode overturns one of the last remaining taboos in Taiwanese society: the private agonies of public figures. The trammis of ordinary people — their maimed bodies and grieving relatives — have long been the staple of news reports.

"There have always been lots of scandals, but it was very difficult to write about them before," said Huang Chao-sung, president of the China Times. "Taiwan has very tough libel laws. But then came this lady, who wanted the whole world to know what happened."

The protagonists' children have now also been engulfed by the scandal. A letter by Mr Huang's 16-year-old daughter attracted far more interest than a far-reaching cabinet reshuffle. She wrote: "No matter what Auntie Chou says about my father, I will always feel he is the greatest father in my heart. Keep going. I love you forever."

As new crews besieged her Taipei home, a note in her handwriting appeared on the front door: "Dear aunties and uncles of the press: I know you will come looking for me today. But mum and I will not come and speak."

EU arms-trade proposal 'will not block exports to repressive regimes'

Richard Norton-Taylor

THE Anglo-French proposal for a European Union code of conduct on the arms trade contains serious loopholes that would allow member states to continue exporting repressive equipment to dictatorships, according to aid and human rights agencies.

A leaked draft of the proposal, to be discussed by ministers in Brussels next week, shows no provision for parliamentary scrutiny of weapons exports, said the group of independent British agencies, including Oxfam, Amnesty International, Saferworld, and the British American Security Information Council.

The group says the proposal allows governments to undercut each other secretly and arms brokers to disguise the

identity of arms suppliers. It would not prevent exports being diverted to war zones.

The group says a significant loophole in one clause would allow EU arms exports to repressive regimes "if the end-use is judged to be legitimate, such as the protection of members of the security forces from violence".

The proposed code, based on British guidelines, would allow the export of paramilitary and police equipment which can be used to abuse human rights, the group says.

Under the guidelines, Britain has approved 22 licences for the export of bombs, ammunition and surveillance equipment to Indonesia, and 86 licences for the sale of rifles, mortars and armoured vehicles to Turkey, it said.

British aid projects to Indonesia, which include more than £1 million on management training for the country's police force despite its human rights record, were criticised yesterday by the House of Commons public accounts committee.

It said the project's aims "would have been more effectively realised had the... objectives been expressed in terms of addressing human rights issues instead of focusing... on the improvement of the Indonesian police force."

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Life of a dog, death of a hero

"This is terrible," Mr Weizman said as he surveyed the

It was the antithesis of what Zionism is supposed to be about, the Ma'ariv newspaper said. "Zionism, in this case, becomes a cover-up for a

Nikolai Rappaport emigrated to Israel three years ago, one of the more than 700,000 Russians who have

His daughter Olga arrived only two months ago. Now they are flying home with Nikolai's body. It seems almost certain they will stay there.

"Something has happened to us. We have lost our tribal sense of responsibility. Our mutual commitment ends, as it did this week on the Leba-

her mind, and her father, too, seems on the point of giving up the Zionist dream. For them and for Nikolai the offer of help came too late.

deaths as "a martyrdom in the cause of peace". He said the crash happened at Nasir, in Upper Nile state. Bad weather caused the plane to

Washington provides military supplies to the Ugandan army, which is believed to be sending weapons and fuel to

1990

An anti-Taliban militiaman watches aid workers unload a Red Cross plane in north-east Afghanistan, where an earthquake last Wednesday killed about 4,500 people. Rough terrain and bad weather have hampered attempts to get supplies through. Agencies are now planning an air drop

PHOTOGRAPH: ABDULAH

AUSTRALIAN monarchists remained hopeful of a tactical victory at the constitutional convention in Canberra last night after an indecisive vote in favour

A final vote will be taken at the last session of the convention today to attempt to achieve the clear majority Mr Howard says is necessary before the republican model can be put to a

John Stacey
[Head of Human Resources
Gardens Museum]

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John Adams 1:50

Analysis Corporations v states



Meet the new world government

These multinationals will be able to take governments to court, under a worrying new agreement to be finalised next week. What happened to democracy? By **David Rowan**

YOU may not have heard of a new international accord called the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. There's no reason why you should have: the MAI has been debated over the past three years in extraordinary secrecy and none of the parties to it has been keen to publicise the process (indeed, it has been mentioned barely two dozen times in the British broadsheets over the last year).

But if you have ever reflected on the growing power of the transnational corporations, and feared that at some stage national governments might finally be forced to bow to their chief executives' demands, you ought to inform yourself rather sharply. Next week that moment will arrive: we may have been busily conducting a loud public debate over Brussels' infringements on our national sovereignty, but we are about to ceding to international investors some

of our more fundamental democratic rights. Over the weekend, representatives from the world's 29 richest countries will gather in Paris to put the final touches to an agreement that will give multinationals power like never before. It will let them sue national governments for any profits lost through laws which discriminate against them. It will put at risk international UN treaties on climate change and over-fishing, and will threaten workplace and environmental legislation to enact. More crucially, it will acknowledge for the first time that corporate capital now has more authority and freedom to act than mere national and local governments.

THE MAI is a comprehensive accord being finalised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) designed to give international investors a "level playing field". It amounts to a new set of investment rules that would grant corporations the right to buy and move their operations wherever they wish around the world, without government regulation. This new investor freedom, the OECD says, will give a new impetus to growth, employment and higher living standards.

The agreement, being prepared in Paris next week for signature by OECD ministers in April, is a logical extension of existing international trade treaties such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). But more than that, it seeks finally to create a world where capital can move entirely free of restriction. As Renato Ruggerio, director-general of the World Trade Organisation, put it: "We are writing the constitution of a single global economy".

The trouble, according to the increasing numbers of groups campaigning against the accord, is that this constitution's bill of rights extends only as far as the investors. It was initiated by business organisations — 477 of the Fortune Global 500 companies are based in OECD countries — in order to make international investment easier. More than 85 per cent of the world's foreign direct investment (known as FDI) flows out from OECD nations, increasingly to developing countries. And the amount is rising rapidly (see panel, left): as business grows more global, FDI is growing faster than trade flows.



One careful owner; no longer needed

concerned that they cannot compete on equal terms with nationals of a host country. So the MAI was designed according to three key principles: non-discrimination (foreign investors cannot be treated worse than domestic companies); no entry restrictions (signatories cannot refuse any form of foreign investment, including the purchase of privatised companies, in any sector apart from defence); and an absence of special conditions (such as to ensure local employment or control currency speculation). "Investment" is defined broadly to extend to intellectual property, real estate and shares. Once a country signs, it cannot withdraw for 5 years and will be bound by the agreement for 15 years.

AND WHAT of a national government that decided to prevent an international press baron from pricing his newspapers below cost? Mr Murdoch's lawyers may well claim that such a strategy sought to discriminate against the multinational News Corporation. A government cheque may eventually have to be forthcoming.

Even the OECD's own guide to the MAI admits that, "as with all binding international agreements, this will moderate the exercise of national authority to some degree". It then offers this not entirely reassuring conclusion: "Governments will remain free to regulate in most fields provided the non-discrimination rule is respected".

Then there are the environmental implications. MAI would, according to Friends of the Earth, let companies oppose the Kyoto agreement, under which industrial countries gave developing countries "climate friendly" technology in return for pollution rights for such rights. The group is warning that UK local authorities, for instance, would be prevented from campaigning against South African wine, as many did during the anti-apartheid boycotts

resources, as foreign multinationals demand equal access to such resources.

The greatest concern comes from those who represent developing countries. They will be invited to sign the agreement when completed, but without having influenced its content. And they will find it hard to resist signing if they want the investment that many consider vital: of the \$12 billion invested in developing countries in 1993, more than 80 per cent ended up in just 12 countries. The 48 least developed (with 10 per cent of world population) attracted just 0.5 per cent of global investment. Yet being "in" will open them up as unlimited new markets for cigarette companies, infant formula marketers, and those seeking to exploit forests and minerals.

There are, however, indications that the growing opposition to the MAI may still be in time to postpone its signing. NGOs have made the issue a priority: according to Nick Mabey, economic policy officer for WWF, "this is bigger now than global warming. Type in 'MAI' on the Web, and you'll get more than 1,000 sites — virtually none in favour, apart from the OECD sites."

day amid fears that France and the EU would have to offer the same creative subsidies to Hollywood under the deal.

Herman van Karnebeek, deputy chairman of the Dutch chemicals group Akzo Nobel, who heads the OECD business and industry advisory committee, said last month: "We now hear of disturbing signs that many of the elements we were hoping for may not be possible. What, then, are we beginning to ask ourselves, is in the MAI for us?"

The NGOs believe they can now exploit the growing divisions. "There's a lot of tension in every European government between the environment and development people and the trade people," says Nick Mabey of WWF. He believes concerned citizens should lobby MPs and ministers to urge a delay in negotiations. "The decision to rush it through was taken in 1995, but most of those ministers are not around now, so there's no political faith to be lost in delaying," he says. "And faced with the problems of a hostile Congress, even the Americans are smiling on the idea of a delay."

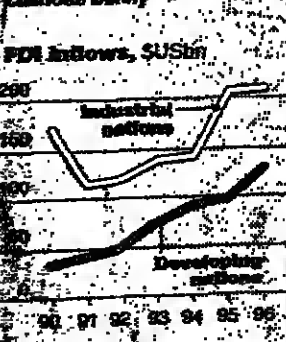
Sources: (1) World Investment Report (UN, 1997); (2) Pulling Up The Drawbridge (World Development Movement, June 97). Other sources include the DTI, Oxfam, WWF, the OECD website (www.oecd.org/dst/otm/mai/mai.htm), Friends of the Earth (www.foe.org/foe/en/mai.htm), and www.citizen.org/petition/mai.html. Graphics: Paddy Allen. Researcher: Matt Keating. David Rowan is editor of the Analysis page; Charlotte Denry is an economics reporter.

Investors' chronicle

Governments prize foreign investment and the provision of jobs and growth that it brings. For multinationals, however, the investment rules that govern the world are a patchwork of national laws and international treaties. The OECD says, will give a new impetus to growth, employment and higher living standards.

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Union on the right terms

Common sense not dogma should be the guide

TONY BLAIR is fast approaching a defining moment of his premiership. He will soon have to decide whether to bow to the CBI or the TUC over the terms on which employees will be able to hold ballots for union recognition. Cynics within the party are worried that he will use this opportunity to create an open breach with new unionism in order to seal his love affair with middle England and ingratiate himself further with the tabloid press and Rupert Murdoch. The manifesto commitment around which the argument revolves is a masterpiece of studied ambiguity. It promised to restore recognition "where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them". It sounds clear but only until you start to think about it.

It could mean that recognition would be granted only where more than 50 per cent of all the workers in a company vote for it (which is the nub of the CBI's spoiling amendment). But, as the TUC points out, this would mean that if the pro-recognition vote secured a 70 per cent majority on a 70 per cent turnout then it would be lost because only 49 per cent of the votes would be in favour. Something wrong there, surely. After all, on such criteria, Labour — which got only 30 per cent of those eligible to vote at the last election — would have lost, condemning it and other political parties to perpetual oblivion.

At the other extreme, if the relevant workforce were simply a majority of those bothering to vote, then a turnout of 100 employees producing a 70 votes to 30 majority in a company employing 1,000 would bring union recognition for all. Equally wrong. And this is before going into the tricky undergrowth of defining whether the "relevant" workforce is the whole company (which may be ten per cent unionised) or existing bargaining units some of which would be highly unionised.

Unions are now far more popular than they were during the 1970s when they appeared to be exerting an undue influence on Labour governments. Thanks to more enlightened leadership and the reforms of the Thatcher era (including compulsory pre-strike ballots) union leaders now believe they could reverse some of the catastrophic losses of members they suffered in the dog days. Winning union recognition, particularly in smaller firms where most of the new jobs are being created, could prove the springboard they have been waiting for.

Mr Blair now has to devise a trade-off between his entirely shrewd wooing of the business vote and the risk of alienating his own party especially his deputy John Prescott and Chancellor Gordon Brown (who has stayed close to the unions). Judging by the number of kites flown by Mr Blair he has been seriously considering a split with the unions, even though he must know it would divide the party in a much more serious way than the row over lone-parent benefits. He would be wise not to take the party to the precipice. This one should be settled by arithmetic, not dogma. It ought to be possible to agree a minimum threshold for the turnout (50 per cent of eligible voters?) to legitimise the ballot. Companies, particularly smaller un-unionised ones, will worry that this could be the thin end of a wedge that would undo the labour reforms of the 1980s.

But granting recognition to unions doesn't mean handing over power, merely the right to negotiate or be consulted. One of the most potentially contentious issues for small firms — low pay — will be settled separately by the Low Pay Commission. The success of the exercise hangs on the inclusiveness that unions and employers will feel able to offer. It is as much a test of New Unionism as it is of New Labour.

Suharto refuses to change

Even in crisis it is still jobs for the boys in Indonesia

IT MAY BE TIME for Bill Clinton to have another chat on the phone with President Suharto. Last month's call from the White House told the Indonesian leader to stop coddling his greedy family and friends, and accept the IMF deal which is supposed to rescue the country from its financial crisis. Three weeks later, the country is again in crisis, while Suharto is once more demonstrating his insensitivity.

Out in the small towns of Indonesia, riots over rising prices and unemployment break out every day. Many acquire an uglier edge when anger is directed against Chinese traders — a traditional target for the Muslim majority. These are minor flare-ups so far in obscure places. They happen at Bumiayu in central Java and at Ende on the island of Flores where there were small riots earlier this week, or at Jatiwangi in west Java where hundreds of people took to the streets yesterday and set fire to some Chinese shops. But they set a worrying pattern which may lead to much worse violence unless the causes of unrest are dealt with.

What is Suharto's response to his people in need of reassurance? It is to level the vague charge that unnamed groups are trying to destabilise the economy, to order his armed forces to "take stern action", to instal a protégé as the new armed forces commander — and to promote his son-in-law to another key appointment. These steps have been taken just weeks ahead of a so-called election when a 1,000-member

college will vote on the presidency. Suharto warns against those who, in the run-up to the election, will make complaints in the name of democracy in order to "confuse the people". There is only one candidate and his name is Suharto. Who is confusing whom?

All this takes place against a background of rekindled forest fires in Sumatra and Borneo. As if nothing had been learnt from last autumn, logging and plantation companies continue to set fires in regions already suffering from drought. The World Health Organisation in Manila is now warning that there could be a repeat of the recent disaster: tourism in the region, already affected by the financial crisis, is expected to decline even further. Indonesia's neighbours are also watching the food riots with alarm, fearful that these could provoke a flight of ethnic Chinese.

Suharto knows what his own priorities are. General Wiranto, now promoted as armed forces chief, is a trusted ex-adjutant to the president who comes from his home region. Wiranto also has ambiguous connections with civilian strong-arm gangs who parade as "upholders of discipline." Suharto's son-in-law Prabowo Suhianto commanded the elite Red Berets and has a vested interest in the Suharto regime's survival. Whether this chimes with the Indonesian people's interests and priorities is quite another matter. Mr Clinton and other Western friends would do well to start reflecting on it.

The right drill for Valentine's day

But beware of other competing claims at the same time

SURVEYS this year suggest romance has disappeared. Men are more likely to receive a power drill than a romantic gift tomorrow on Valentine's Day. About one quarter of women in a survey published yesterday said they were planning to go to a DIY store to buy this year's Valentine's present. Is this a new age of utilitarianism or is it the reverse of the old Spare Rib jibe: you begin by sinking into his arms and end up plunging your arms into his sink? A similar survey two years ago found two-thirds of people did not intend to buy any present and believed the festival was a rip-off. There is nothing new in that accusation yet card manufacturers claim over 20 million Valentine cards will be sold of which 10 million will be delivered by the Post Office. Men remain more romantic — or less pragmatic — than women with 64 per cent declaring they would be buying flowers or chocolates. Over 800 people are

spending at least £20 sending a Valentine through The Guardian's columns tomorrow, which is lower than earlier years, but the general decline in numbers could be related to an increasing number of papers copying our initiative. At least it will take less time to read through the pet names, hieroglyphics, and coded messages to find one's personal Valentine. One reader spent £90 on a special message.

British Airways introduced a new dimension this time with a weekend Valentine trip to North America that attracted six million calls on Thursday. BA said was worth £2,500 was being sold for £14. May the 100 couples who won be warned against visiting Niagara Falls — the second biggest disappointment of the honeymoon, as one wit noted. And, whisper it quietly, tomorrow is also something else. National Impotence day.

Volcano...



Letters to the Editor

Prince Charles and the old Rex

THOSE of us who work in the mental health field can point to numerous "Denises" (Care in the Community, Society, February 11). However, Graham Thornicroft seems not to notice that, by his own definition of the problem, Denise would refuse 24-hour nursing care, as she has refused everything else, and so still face detention or deterioration. Kind R Gilmore, Rannoch, North Lancashire, West Sussex BN15 0QD.

THE photograph of the Prince of Wales (G2, February 10) did not show the Prince, and entourage, trekking in the Himalayan foothills as your caption claimed. It showed Greg Whitley, WaterAid's country representative in Nepal, hosting a working visit to water projects by the Prince of Wales, WaterAid's president, Jon Lane. Director, WaterAid, 27-29 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UB.

IN reply to Ian Laval's complaint about the passenger whose sign language entreaties to a Virgin guard were ignored (Letters, February 11): while it is true that delayed departures may cost train operators money, our main concern in declining entry to the train after the doors have been shut is safety. Once the central door-locking mechanism has been engaged, and the lights above the doors extinguished, train dispatch has the clearance to signal departure to the driver. Dominic Ryan, Virgin Rail Group Limited, Euston Station, London NW1 2HS.

DAN Glaister's observation (A narrow field of view, February 10) that "Exhibitors in the UK are a little greedy, giving only 30 per cent of the ticket price back to the distributor" brought a hollow laugh down here in Wareham, where a group of us are keeping alive the 77-year-old Rex, probably Britain's only surviving gaslit cinema. In 1997 we had to hand over 48.96 per cent of our ticket sales to distributors — another example of skinty cats having to subsidise fat cats. Eric Lewis, Wareham, Dorset BH20 4JX.

AS your leader (February 11) points out, the why of buying mineral water is far from obvious. But the how is using cars to shop at supermarkets. It didn't take long to give up carrying the stuff when I gave up my car. Martyn Wells, 18 Range Road, Edinburgh EH9 1UQ.

YOUR summary of art engendered by Holocaust (G2, February 11) failed to mention Georges Perec's *W or The Memory of Childhood*. This incomparable work — by a French Jew whose parents died in the Holocaust — says so much, so eloquently, about the camp system, that it is one of the great documents of the Shoah. Paul Byre, 103 Cavendish Road, London E4 6NG.

YOU report "BT says it would like to charge its customers less for calling mobile phones, but insists it has to charge that much because the mobile companies charge BT a hefty amount for connecting the call to the mobile" (Analysis, February 12). If any additional cost is involved at all, surely it should be BT charging the mobile phone companies for connection via the landlines. Bob Pearson, 3 Mill Drive, Bourne, Lincs PE10 9EX.

What drives the drug test

THERE appears still to be widespread confusion about the effects of smoking cannabis (Spot tests, February 12). All recognised effects, from immediate hunger — the "munchies" — to mild paranoia are the consequences of the concentrating effect of the drug. Senses are enhanced and the mind is focused, so mild amusement becomes the giggles etc.

I drive regularly while smoking cannabis, and indeed would be reluctant to go long distances without some — it focuses my attention on the task at hand, ie driving, and without it 500 miles continuous driving would be impossible, not to mention unsafe. There are circumstances in which I would not drive high, but they are exclusively those in which I would not drive at all, such as extreme tiredness, or if I'd had a drink.

I don't expect Jack Straw to believe any of the rest of the case against "drug-driving" offences, but the idea that a joint smoked a month before renders you a danger to society is utterly absurd. It would be more honest to institute compulsory random drug tests for everyone.

Finally, 16 per cent of all road users in accidents have tested positive for cannabis, but how many of those not in accidents would too? About the same? Name and address supplied.

THE idea of random tests for cannabis on drivers is positively Hitlerian. Cannabis stays in the system for up to 60 days. You could be in a room where people are smoking marijuana and be banned from driving 48 hours later. Robin Marchesi, 3 Crescot Mansions, 122 Elgin Crescent, London W11 2JN.

POWERFUL as may be the arguments for random breath-testing, the police do not yet have that power. But here it comes now, through the back door. The proposal is that any driver may be stopped and tested for being under the influence of drugs. He may decline, but then he may be breathalysed. So there it is: random breath-testing. Ernest Evans, 25A Whitehill, Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire BA15 1SQ.

IS Lord Perry (Lords defy Straw over cannabis, February 11) using the term "sociological prejudice" to refer to evidence which is not useful in a national debate about drugs? The word prejudice means to prejudge. Surely, he is already prejudging sociology.

ical evidence as useless? I suggest the contrary is true, particularly with a debate which needs to consider the lifestyles of drug users. Patrick Candian, 41 The Drive, Tynemouth NE30 4JW.

LORD Perry's belief in "scientific evidence" is touching, but it is not clear whether he is excluding all social inquiry or just that which is approached "unscientifically". How rigorously does he question the validity of his favoured form of "evidence"? I wonder, and will the inquiry be looking at data from countries where cannabis use is not considered deviant? Jacqui Croft, Bristol BS10.

GOING Dutch ducks the issues of drugs in Britain and prevents society benefiting from their legalisation. Decriminalisation allows the dealers and importers to continue making piles of cash. We lose the potential tax revenue and the police still spend time chasing imports. It also ignores the environmental benefits of hemp. A half-way house is fine for smokers and no one else. Bertie Cairns, 4 Hereford House, Rushcroft Road, London SW2 1LQ.

Lord's domain

MADEIRAINE Bunting (Chuck out the Bishops, Faiths, one can hardly blame the Church of England, because the privileges which establishment conveys no longer correspond to reality. She is, however, wrong to imply that the Church might wither away if the props of establishment were kicked from under it.

The Church of England has platted itself around the world. True, this expansion was initially a by-product of the British empire. But when the empire disappeared, the church remained and continues to flourish in many different countries and cultures. Rev Geoffrey Rider, 8 Kenwyn Road, London SW20 8TR.

We do not publish letters where only an e-mail address is supplied; please include a full postal address. We may edit letters: shorter ones are more likely to appear. We regret we cannot acknowledge those not used.

A Country Diary

GLOUCESTERSHIRE: On a bright Sunday morning we walked on the footpath which runs parallel to the road across the Severn Bridge. It spans the river at almost the point which, for long centuries, the Aust ferries piled back and forth. The light traffic hound for Wales thundered past, but I was looking down at the muddy waters of the estuary with their currents and cross rips. Up through this water in the few weeks will come the annual mass migration of eels, the tiny immature eels which must already be well on their way across the cold winter waters of the Atlantic from their starting point in the Sargasso Sea. The eel season, which runs for five weeks or so as they head up the river with each tide, is the basis of a local industry. Two of the favoured stretches of the water see competing fishermen with their awkward wooden-framed scoop nets trying to maximise their catch. My friend Dodger, a

Toe-curling sports stories

CHANGED the channel to view the Winter Olympics from Nagano expecting to be bored senseless. However I was drawn in as I observed the ladies curling.

This is played on an ice rink with heavy round granite shapes (not unlike a chamber pot) with a handle at the top for releasing it to slide along the ice in the hope of getting it to rest in the middle of a circle at the other end. Once the curl has been released, a couple of team mates run in front of it brandishing brushes, sweeping madly in the hope that their efforts will make the lump travel further. While all this is happening, the place erupts, with everyone effing and blinding with enthusiasm.

I rushed into the kitchen, grabbed the sweeping brush and dashed back into the sitting-room just in time to lend a hand to the team I was backing. There I was sweeping the carpet furiously and I'm convinced my contribution managed to get that vital extra few inches which were needed to ensure victory. Robert Sullivan, Glangariff Road, Bantry, Co Cork.

THE hishops are over-reacting to Good Friday football (New church row despite Easter soccer match move, February 12). Good Friday is not even a public holiday in Ireland, Italy or the US. However, at a time when there is increasing pressure to omit Christian imagery, in order not to offend people of other faiths, one can hardly blame the Christian churches for objecting to something which causes offence to many members of their own faith. Michael Clarke, 9/10 Carlton Drive, London SW15 2BV.

RAMPANT commercialism is not confined to Manchester United (Letters, 6 February). The current owners of Leeds United seem more intent on property development than football. They have just unveiled a planning application for a 18,000 seat stadium next to the Elland Road stadium, where rock concerts will be staged about once a fortnight. As a result many local residents are likely to be annoyed by the permanently imprisoned in their own homes. Whether Leeds council will show more backbone than Manchester remains to be seen. Bob Wood, 31 Sunnyview Avenue, Leeds LS11 8QY.



Laughable piece of science

SAYING that a "walnut-sized piece of tissue on the left frontal lobe of the brain" is the source of humour is a bit like saying that feet are the source of walking (Funny Bone? It's all in the mind, February 12). The Los Angeles doctors don't show what combination of perception, fantasies and memories come

together to naturally stimulate that area, nor why. The really interesting question, posed by the study is why the patient thought that everything she looked at, including her medical team, simply looked funny. C M McSherry, 25 The Grove, Clacton CO15 1TJ.

Hidden cost of biffing Rupert

I AM as keen as the next Labour MP to biff Rupert but are you quite sure that a law stopping newspapers selling at dodgy prices is the right way forward (Minister promises to investigate Murdoch price war, February 12)? I seem to remember a few years ago Brian Redhead always described the Guardian as a "kept woman", allowed to sell at a price to win sales by the subsidies of the Manchester Evening News. What would the real economic price of the Observer each Sunday be without the generous help from the now profitable Guardian?

By all means propose a law saying that newspapers have to sell at a price fixed by a bureau. Conrad Black and David Montgomery both well-known advocates of the state fixing prices and rigging the market, will cheer you on. But be careful lest someone adds a little amendment outlawing all the other subsidies that operate in the murky world of newspaper cover price fixing and which, thank you, kept the Guardian alive and give us the excellent Observer each Sunday. Denis McShane MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

PETER Stothard springs valiantly to the defence of his boss, Rupert Murdoch,

and claims that the Times and Sunday Times "taken together in the normal way, have always been highly profitable". Good to know that. In 1981 Murdoch gained control of Times Newspapers — with its golden freight of Reuters shares — by pretending something very different. He, and Mrs Thatcher's collusive government, were desperate to avoid referral of his bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. That was, and is, a legal necessity in any newspaper merger — unless it can be shown that the target properties face financial meltdown.

Nobody with any sense believed it then, and Peter Stothard confirms our scepticism. Bruce Page, 32 Lauderdale Tower, London EC2Y 8BY.

Political
tell us

Commentary

Isabel
Hilton

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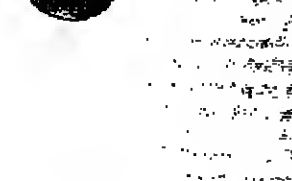


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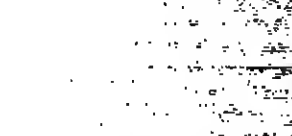


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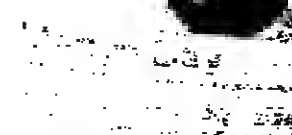
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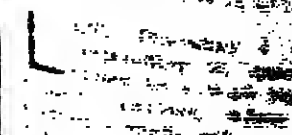
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The relief



Diary

Matthew Norman

THE affair between Mr Tony Blair and Rupert Murdoch heats up. It seems. Last Tuesday, my friend Mandy Mandelson faxed an article about Tony to several papers. This one London Evening Standard on Wednesday. The day the Times devoted its first leader to the issue. The Opposition was "trivial in its choice of material," roared the Thunderer. "Mr Hague should let the tabloid press make the running." Mandy sneered that such things might interest "a media obsessed with trivia." The Tories want "a media obsessed with trivia." The Labour as at least an ethically challenged as the Major administration. "said the Times." "The overall strategic aim seems to be," said Mandy, "to say that... Labour is just as tainted [as the Tories]." The Times called the Tories "obsessed with the short term." While Mandy railed at "their opportunistic forays." And so on. Well, well, well. So have New Labour and News International undergone a corporate Vulcan mind meld? Or is Mandy moonlighting as a leader writer on the Times? Ach, who cares. It's love, that's what, and on Valentine's Eve, let's just leave it at that.

THE secret of Enoch Powell's frenetic brilliance features tonight on BBC2. In a repeat of the documentary *Odd Man Out*, Enoch tells Michael Cockerell that he had to be nervous to speak at his best. Was it true, then, asks Cockerell, that he preferred to orate on a full bladder? "Well, you shouldn't be relaxed," says Enoch, "and if you need to clear your bladder to relax you, you should refrain." This insight into his rhetoric seems sure to provoke controversy among Enoch scholars, such as former car-wash mod Simon Heffer. Could it be, some will posit, that it was a urinary infection — or possibly gallstones — and not immigration at all that suggested to a bursting Enoch the phrase "rivers of blood" in 1968?

THE dramatic political rethink of my friend Sir Peregrine Worthington, whose leftward journey Sabine Durrant described in her interview on Saturday, causes wild speculation, and my colleague Simon Bowers rang yesterday to put to Perry a rumour. Is it true that, having now embraced anarchism, Perry has been recruited by Chumbawamba, and is to make his debut on stage in Japan next week as bongo player Perrybert Lenthilbead? "Ha, ha, ba, I'm afraid I have no musical inclination really." Precisely. "No, no, I'm not a musical tastes." This is a shame. For all that the looks like Danny La Rue's sybaritic brother, Perrybert is not a bad old stick, and would have made a useful addition to the line up.

TENSION persists between management and workers at the Morning Star. The staff, you may recall, are furious at the suspension of editor John Haylett, and his replacement by Paul Corry. A member by marriage of the controlling family whose dynastic instincts have won them the nickname "the North Kureans". Ballotting for further action is being held after the one-day strike last Wednesday. This meant there was no paper on Thursday, and when the Star returned on Friday, readers scoured the pages for an explanation for its absence the previous day. They found none. This was the first British strike, it is believed, the Morning Star has failed to cover since it first appeared (as the Daily Worker) in 1930.

ETON College is seeking a Dame (the school's term for what the late Kenneth Williams knew as "Mam") to be responsible for treating illness and injury, the boys' manners and discipline, appearance and dress. In tiny print beneath the advert, meanwhile, is this: "Eton College is an equal opportunity employer." We wish all gentlemen applicants the very best of British.

I BUY MOST THINGS HERE BUT NOT THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

AST Thursday I was responding to queries raised by a Wall Street tobacco analyst, when he suddenly made reference to his circulating my comments to his stockholder clients. I broke into a cold sweat. Had the analyst turned, mid-con-

Politicians should tell us the EMU truth

Commentary

Isabel Hilton

HOW many professors does it take to change a policy? If they are German professors of economics, it appears, more than 100. Rather late in the day, the professors wrote a collective letter appealing to the German government to effect an "orderly postponement" of EMU because, they argued, there was insufficient convergence. They were all just not right now. It was a German variant on that well-known British device, the principle of unripe time. The German government responded with all guns blazing.

The professors were wrong, they said, and besides, the Maastricht treaty allowed for no delay. To take the second point first, the Maastricht treaty is as elastic as its signatories choose to make it. Technically, it's true. EMU will go ahead, willy nilly, on Jan 1 with those countries that meet the criteria. But the loophole, as both the professors and the German government know, is the judgment of those criteria.

If the criteria are applied with draconian severity, if no rules are bent and if the feasibility of continuing the effort is judged strictly, then it would be possible to rule out everyone bar Luxembourg, a result reminiscent of the old Zen joke about the sound of one hand clapping. But that won't happen, because, at this point, EMU has ceased to be a matter only of economics. And, pace the professors of economics, their point, too, is really a political one. Why should these eminent academics make what appears to be a

quixotic gesture? Because this autumn Germany is awash with elections, and, knowing that the German public is nervous about abandoning the D-mark, the professors have fired a warning shot across the bows of those German politicians who are pre-occupied, as politicians tend to be, with keeping their jobs. What can

If we don't say anything, they whisper to each other, perhaps people won't notice

be gained by this exercise? You will find it in paragraph nine of the German professors' letter: if orderly postponement is out, they say, then the convergence criteria must be applied "without any indulgence". There is virtue in this, of course, but is virtue what they had in mind? This group of professors include many who are anti-EMU on any terms and some happily admit

that the Luxembourg option is their preferred result. Failing that, they hope to achieve at least the exclusion of Italy and Spain. There, they may have a chance. Chancellor Kohl knows that the gaseous German electorate could stomach monetary union with Luxembourg, even with France and Belgium, (whose claims to meet the criteria are not impeccable), but might exact revenge if they were forced, as they see it, to jeopardise their currency by sharing it with the unreliable Mediterraneans. EMU is, to put it mildly, a bit of a gamble.

But there is an equally persuasive argument that the discipline of a functioning EMU is the best guarantee of continuing economic virtue. Postponing the decision to governments to breathe out, the markets would decide if it

anyone has much to fear from this particular apparition. But there are more worrying signs that the spirit of the German professors is gaining ground in the UK, despite the early promise of a more rational approach to Europe from the Labour Government. The Chancellor, it is reported, has decided that it's not worth taking £1 million of EU money to publicise EMU because to do so would churn up the poisonous marsh gases of the Sun newspaper.

This is much the same position that every British politician, with the less than inspiring exception of Edward Heath, has taken on Europe since the formation of the Coal and Steel Community. If we don't say anything, they whisper to each other, perhaps people won't notice. And if anyone asks, we can pretend that (a) it won't happen or (b) it doesn't add up to much.

Margaret Thatcher chose (b) when she signed the Single European Act. Ken Clark, as Chancellor, chose (a) in his dealings on EMU. The genial Mr Clarke, of course, had his fingers crossed. Now he's a signed-up member of the European Movement and is telling us that the single currency will happen, so we may as well get used to it. Personally, I prefer the revisionist position, but I regret the putrid nature of politics in Britain that dictates that our politicians will only tell us the truth about the things that really matter after they are out of office.



This law must come



The Commons prepares to debate the Human Rights Bill next week, as Lord Alexander

welcomes the likely privacy rules the tabloids fear so much.

OUR judges have long shrunk from creating a common law right of privacy. Our law of civil wrongs, developed on a case by case basis in defined and sometimes watertight categories: assault, deceit, nuisance, defamation, and breach of confidence. A few years ago newspaper journalists offensively invaded the privacy of the actor Gordon Kaye, in hospital after a severe accident. The Court of Appeal decided it could not recognise a right of privacy. But there is now a shift of sentiment. Some of our senior judges believe that incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights may encourage the courts to create such a law in actions between

private citizens. This development is far from certain. The convention only applies as against public bodies. Courts could still take the view that the common law, developing as it does on a case by case basis, was the wrong instrument to shape a general law of privacy, including the appropriate defence where there is a legitimate public interest in a story. They could properly take the view, after all the public debate, that such a right should be created, if at all, by legislation.

But it would not be over-surprising if they took the contrary view. For privacy may be a fundamental right, but it is at bottom no more than a modest ambition. It has sometimes been described simply as the right "to be let

alone". We have long given some important recognition to this freedom in the doctrine that "an Englishman's home is his castle". But the world is changing and growing more crowded and communications techniques are more intrusive. It has been cogently said: "The press is overstepping the bounds of propriety and decency in every direction... Technological advances make the case for action urgent. Photographs and newspapers have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life."

Not the words of Sir David Calcutt. Or even of David Mellor. But rather of two leading US lawyers as long ago as 1980. Even in that country, which rightly places so much importance on freedom of expression, a right of privacy has long existed. It protects against unacceptable intrusion and against unreasonable publicity given to private life. Yet it has hardly made free speech in the US a hushed flush. There is a vigorous public-interest defence, and the law has regularly recognised the right to publish matters of legitimate concern.

But it has also clearly and importantly distinguished between the true public interest and what can be said merely to interest or titillate the public.

By contrast the US laws of defamation provide greater protection for the press than do our own. The so-called "ab-

sence of malice" defence makes it more difficult for a public figure to bring a libel action because it protects careful and responsible journalism even if it subsequently turns out that some of the facts are inaccurate. No one can possibly liken the US press to a muzzled poodle, and their law eloquently demonstrates that privacy and a free press can be properly put in balance and co-exist.

If press proprietors were bold, they might consider taking up Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger's suggestion for a statutory law of privacy linked with greater protection of the press in defamation actions through a US-style "absence of malice" defence. This would ensure that any right of privacy was properly proportioned to the invasion it would preclude all the uncertainties which would flow if the judges developed the law in individual cases over a number of years.

OR whether at common law, or by statute, all of us, including the press, need a right of privacy. It is not just the media which can threaten privacy. We are now all at risk from sophisticated surveillance technology which can record whispered conversations from hundreds of yards away. Exchange and Mart carries alarming proof of how cheaply and readily available miniature bugs, cameras and listening devices are. Many can be bought for less than £100. Computers can recognise faces and car numbers from video images. They can track most of our goings out and comings in, and whatever we do in between. The potential misuse of data and data matching are advancing the Orwellian society and threatening intrusion to an alarming extent.

The law has simply not kept up with these developments. To take one simple example, it is currently not illegal for an employer to bug the work telephones of employees. The European Convention recently provided protection for Assistant Chief Constable Alison Halford, whose police work telephones appeared to have been bugged after she claimed she had been a victim of sex discrimination. But she worked for a public concern. Here, either the law or the judges should fill the gap by supporting a right to privacy. Only in this way can we be protected against the accelerating advance of technological challenges which, without our knowledge, can cut deep into those aspects of our life which we would expect to be sacrosanct.

Lord Alexander of Weedon QC chairs JUSTICE, the all-party law reform group

How I help out Tina Brown at the New Yorker



Bel Littlejohn

THE most happening initials in the world today? TB.

TB stands not just for Tony Blair — though that's quite good enough for me! — but also for his close friend and important contact Tina Brown, now celebrating her 58th year as world-famous editor of the legendary New Yorker.

In that time, she's turned the magazine round from being, in her own words, a stodgy literary-thinky-storey kinda thing to being a prestigious sensibility-seekers lifestyle arts-stroke-pulse-taking niche magazine alive with the latest literary gossip, high fashion and top-rating murder — as well as boasting high-quality wordy-wordy pieces from some of the most costly writers in the world and a running loss of roughly an impressive \$1 million a month.

As the New Yorker's Special European Projects Editor with Co-ordinating Responsibility for Homicide and Haute Couture, I have grown to admire Tina's tremendous sense of energy and style. She really knows how to turn a piece round, so that if a kind of thinky-classy Saul Bellow kind of subordinate, claustral kind of writer hands in what we call a writey-writey piece on say, "The Novel in the 21st Century", and we're all like, thinking "Whadda we gonna do with that?", then Tina will be able to take one look at it and after barely a glance she'll say, "Didn't Karl Faye Tucker have something to say about the novel in the 21st century before the fatal and tragic needles plunged into her arms in three different places? I want it on my desk by lunchtime — and let's get Bellow dressed by Clivey for a beautiful black and white portrait, maybe in a Captain's Hat so it has a tribute-to-the-Titanic-Leonardo-di-Caprio style feel to it — I want Helmut Newton on the line now!" That way we'll turn what would have been a kinda special-interest slogy kinda brainbox-cum-wordy piece into an oh-my-god-must-read this kinda piece — and, believe me, with no overall loss of the Big Q — ie quality.

three months ago, she faxed me and around 200, 250 very close friends saying the White House had specifically asked her for information input on potential invitee A-listy kinda people to last week's White House ball in honour of Cherie and Tony, so she was resourcing mutual colleagues for feedback-style in-flow possibilities as to who Cherie and Tony's contacts might be, either now or in the future but let's forget the past, okay?

Tina makes no bones about being a New Laboury kinda person to the core. Don't talk to her about the down-trodden in our society: half of them are in her office. And New Yorker magazine has the most fabulous social conscience. Our editors are always on the look-out for 10,000 or even 12,000-word takes on say, transsexual victims of serial murderers howsoever lowly they may be, or, like, date-rape ex-girlfriends of the Kennedys, or Miami low-lifers who once sustained intimacy with Gianni Versace, or tragic, tragic, photogenic-style kids like Jonbenet Ramsey — alternatively very moving and humane-type exclusive coma-style photographs of Sunny Von Bulow in hospital, maybe dressed by Calvin Klein.

TO ME, Tina's a warrior for truth. If she wants to know the truth concerning what's going on in The White House, she's not gonna bother with no underdog, she's not gonna sully her hands with the used goods, hell no, she's gonna go straight to the president himself, or at very least to his chief of staff, and she's gonna say, hey, forget the squalor and rancour of the trivia corps. I want the truth and I want it now, how about, like, your press guys come right out with it and say the president didn't know nothing and we print it over 5,000-6,000 words — could we move a deal where we get exclusive rights to a full-colour photograph of the President and Hillary maybe dancing on the White House lawn, their love and mutual respect bondless, the president looking absurdly debonair, his blue, blue eyes projecting a kind of avoid inclusiveness that encircles every jaded celebrity they honour with their touch?

And one TB just adores the other TB. Tony Blair, it's to her not just the kinda guy who finally knighted Elton John, not just the kinda guy who made it from nowhere to the top of the Britcool tree, not just the kinda guy whose wife still shoots him that ardent look that says, "Darling, we made it didn't we?" No sir, Tina's also the kinda guy who can help Tina help others help Tina. As they say in the States, with all their contagious enthusiasm and superb lack of cynicism, "Betcha-by-golly-wow!"

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FIT THE BEST

Renée Epelbaum

Standing up to terror

When I first met Renée Epelbaum, who has died aged 77, at the Thursday demonstration of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in the main square of Buenos Aires, she introduced herself thus: "I have three disappeared children. All my children."

Her eldest son, Luis, a medical student, had been kidnapped by the Argentinean security forces in 1976. He was one of some 30,000 people who disappeared into more than 340 secret concentration camps; only a handful were ever seen again. A month later, Renée sent her two younger children, Lila and Claudio, to neighbouring Uruguay, believing they would be safe. But after three months they too were kidnapped by an Argentinean commando unit with the help of the Uruguayan army.

The "dirty war" waged by the Argentinean military junta was designed to eliminate all opposition and to spread a sense of fear among the population. With a few notable exceptions, the press, the judiciary, the trade unions and the majority of leading church and political figures were silent about the kidnappings. Renée, who was herself Jewish, was always critical of the Jewish establishment, which, she felt, failed to support the victims of repression. She became one of the first to demonstrate publicly against the disappearances.

Together with other mothers of the *desaparecidos*, as the disappeared came to be known, she walked in silent protest in Plaza de Mayo, and became one of the founders of the association that took its name from the square. The risk the protesters took became clear when 13 of them and their supporters were kidnapped and disappeared themselves, but this only reinforced Renée's determination to seek out the truth.

"I don't think we believed we were being brave," she said. "In the beginning, we were just desperate to know what had happened to our children." She held meetings in her home and after the death of her husband, the mothers became her family.

Renée was an educated and sophisticated woman, who had once taught literature, but she had no previous experience of politics. A fluent English speaker, she contacted human rights organiza-

tions in Europe, including Amnesty International. Through them, the mothers could tell an unbelieving world about what was happening in Argentina and were protected from the worst excesses of the dictatorship.

Renée understood the risks involved, as one of her colleagues recalled. "I remember the first time she gave a press conference in Canada, during the worst of the dictatorship. She was told to be careful, that she could be killed when she returned to Argentina. I care about what we do today, not about what happens tomorrow," she replied.

It was during a visit of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organisation of American States to Buenos Aires in 1979 that Renée found out what had happened to her children. While queuing to report her case to the commission, she met someone who had been with them in a concentration camp. Soon after, they were "transferred", a euphemism used by the camp authorities for "murdered".

In 1983, three years after constitutional government had been restored, Renée, with nine of the 10 other mothers who had formed the original association, left to set up the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Founding Line. She opposed what she saw as the confrontational stance of the association towards the new government, believing that co-operation with some of its human rights initiatives was necessary. She supported the trials of the military juntas for human rights abuses in 1985, which she saw as an example to other Latin American countries, only to be disillusioned by the amnesties that followed.

Until her death, she fought tirelessly with the Founding Line and other human rights organisations against the immunity of those responsible for the disappearances. Like all the mothers of the disappeared, Renée became a symbol of courage in the struggle for human rights in Latin America and a source of inspiration for women throughout the continent in the fight for democracy.

Jo Fisher

Renée Epelbaum, human rights activist, born 1920; died February 7, 1998



Democracy defeated... Qudsi's ambitions to unite Syria and Iraq were broken by more powerful revolutionary forces

Nazim al-Qudsi

Dreams of Arab unity

THE veteran Arab statesman Nazim al-Qudsi, who has died aged 91, was one of the most distinguished survivors of Syria's parliamentary democracy, which flourished briefly after the second world war before it was swept away by the violent intervention of the army in politics.

As independent Syria's first ambassador to the United States, Qudsi was the last living signatory of the United Nations charter of 1945. He was also the last president of his country in 1963-65 before a secret military committee, which included Hafez al-Assad, seized power in the name of the

Ba'ath Party in March 1963 and drove him into exile. Qudsi was the most important political leader to emerge from Aleppo, the major city of northern Syria, which, for generations, had sat astride the trade route from Europe and Anatolia to Mesopotamia, Iran and India. Aleppo had prospered within the unity of the Ottoman Empire, but had suffered after the first world war when the region was carved up by Britain and France into separate states and spheres of influence.

Aleppo merchants, for whom Baghdad and points east were natural outlets and trading partners, deeply resented the suffocating, newly-created political and trade barriers be-

tween Syria and Iraq. It was Qudsi's enduring ambition to abolish these barriers by bringing about a "fertile crescent" union of Syria and Iraq. This was one of the principal aims of the People's Party he helped form in 1948, which largely represented business and landed interests in Aleppo and northern Syria, and which he led for much of his political career.

Iraq, however, was then ruled by a Hashemite king under British protection — monarchical and foreign connections, which were anathema to Damascus republicans, to emerging radical forces such as the Ba'ath Party, and to ambitious army officers. This was also a time when Syria, the geopolitical heart of Arab Asia, was the object of a tug-of-war between Iraq, on the one hand, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia, on the other.

So Qudsi faced formidable opposition and never fulfilled his ambition. He was jailed in 1949 by Colonel Husni Zaim, Syria's first military putschist (who leaned towards Egypt), released and reinstated by his successor, Colonel Adib al-Shishakli — before landing in jail once again for seeking to limit the army's growing ambitions.

The overthrow of Shishakli in 1954, and the free elections of that year, ushered in four years of more or less democratic government — Syria's last — during which Qudsi served as parliamentary speaker. But this phase was brought to a dramatic end when the army and its Ba'athist allies stamped Syria into a shot-gun union with Nasser's Egypt in 1958.

When yet another coup, in 1961, broke Syria free from the ill-fated union, fresh elections brought Qudsi's People's Party to prominence once again and he was elected president, serving for 18 turbulent months before Assad and his fellow conspirators, mostly from rural and minority backgrounds, seized power in 1963.

Qudsi had a mild, scholarly, bespectacled appearance. He was an honourable, old-guard politician — a man of personal integrity, democratic instinct and internationalist outlook. But, at a time of social and political turmoil in the Middle East, he was up against revolutionary forces more powerful than the class and regional interests he represented.

He spent his years of exile in Lebanon, the south of France and latterly Jordan, the friend and respected counsellor of Arab kings and princes. He is survived by six sons.

Patrick Seale

Nazim al-Qudsi, Syrian statesman, born February 14, 1906; died February 6, 1998

Brian Foss

Mind matters for the people

BRIAN Foss, who has died aged 76, played an important role in presenting scientific psychology to a wider readership. As editor of the highly successful *New Horizons in Psychology* (1962), he introduced broad, current areas of investigation in (mainly British) psychology to both the informed and the inquiring. The book was translated into eight languages and had a wide influence, especially in Europe.

This success launched a major publishing programme with Brian Foss as general editor. He oversaw production of more than 70 titles covering the whole spectrum of psychology, and for a decade from 1964, Penguin dominated the market in affordable psychological literature. When he arrived to take up the chair in psychology at Bedford College, London, in 1968, Brian quipped that he had "webbed feet".

Brian Foss had a wide range of interests in psychology in an era when it was still possible to know something about most aspects of the discipline. He published articles on topics as diverse as human conflict, laughter, rat behaviour and crying in infants. This breadth served him well in his editorial roles and he had a facility for integrating diverse information and picking out overall patterns.

He was a son of the Methodist manse, and won an exhibition to read mathematics and physics at Cambridge. His interest in psychology was fostered through the library of the Natural Institute of Industrial Psychology and, after his Cambridge degree, he went to Oxford to study for a diploma in psychology (no degree was available). He held academic appointments at Oxford and Birkbeck College, London, before moving to the chair of educational psychology at the London Institute of Education in 1964.

Four years later, he moved to Bedford College as head of the psychology department. He oversaw the transfer of the department to the site of the Royal Holloway College, when the two institutions merged in 1982.

Infant development, his main focus, developed from investigations into animal learning. He found that mynah birds imitated, whether they

were rewarded or not. Imitation made evolutionary sense and Brian, typically, developed a link with the superficially unconnected phenomena of group formation and crowd behaviour. However, he found that human mothers imitated their infants more often than the reverse, so it was not a simple case of an innate human predisposition to imitate.

Brian's main influence in this field was again through his editorship of a series, *Determinants of Infant Behaviour* (1961-68). A Penguin volume, *New Perspectives in Child Development* (1974), followed.

The department at Bedford College, still small on his arrival, expanded rapidly, but Brian remained accessible to staff and students, and maintained a caring and friendly atmosphere. He continued to know the students well, and his weekly sherry parties ensured different mixes of personnel.

He was no mean musician and occasionally, when suitably mellowed, in might be persuaded to accompany himself on the piano, while singing some esoterically psychological ditties, for which he had composed the music in his Birkbeck days. His other main interest was in gardening, and he sometimes claimed that he knew more about that than about psychology — though nobody could believe this.

He will be remembered with affection by those who worked with him and were taught by him.

John Wilding

Brian Maltzard Foss, psychologist, born October 25, 1921; died December 23, 1997



Foss... 'webbed feet'

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

THERE was an error in a letter, as filed to us, from the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, Page 18 yesterday. It referred to the Police Federation when it should have said Police Foundation.

ALSO on the Letters page, Page 18 yesterday, the name of the band Chumbawamba, was wrongly spelt in a cartoon.

THERE were some mistaken references to Bob Dylan in a report and picture caption on Page 7 yesterday. He did not appear at Woodstock, which took place in 1969 and not 1967.

AN INDEX above the masthead, Page 1, Society, February 11, referred readers to a mental health story on Page 4. It was to be found on Page 9.

IN A column on the Economics page, Page 17, February 9, inflation forecasts from Martin Weale and Garry Young were attributed to the Institute for Economic Affairs. Weale and Young are fellows for the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR).

It is the policy of the Guardian to correct errors as soon as possible. Readers may contact the office of the Guardian's Editor, Ian Mackay, by telephoning 0171 239 5959 between 11am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Fax: 0171 239 5957. E-mail: reader@guardian.co.uk

Roly Wason

A life on the road

THE delightfully eccentric Roly Wason, who has died aged 70, was a farmer and a bus driver. He also wrote *Rebel Scotland* — a radical interpretation of Scottish history.

Wason was born in Cossington, Somerset. His father was a rear-admiral and his mother died nursing the wounded in France during the first world war. This background, as well as two Scottish Liberal MPs as forefathers, engendered a rather cosy conservatism, but also a love of Scotland — Wason was brought up in Aberdeenshire after his mother's death.

After attending Rugby school, he went to Cambridge, where his political thinking underwent a fundamental change, moving towards Marxism. He graduated with a first-class honours degree (with distinction) in Latin, Greek and Ancient History and went to Canada as professor of archaeology at the University of Toronto.

He returned after a year and taught briefly in Edinburgh before, in the late 1930s, becoming a skilled lens grinder at Barr & Stroud in Glasgow. While there, he became a shop steward and set up what was the most efficient socialist network seen on Clydeside. This was followed by an unsuccessful stint as a fruit farmer in Somerset. In 1953, Roly became works manager for Ri-

chards & Timms, a Hartlepool engineering firm. The company fell victim to the recession of the 1950s and Roly and his wife became bus conductors for West Hartlepool Corporation Transport Roly delighted the passengers, especially the children, with his stories and poems, which subsequently became the raw



Wason... lessons on the Net

material for his delightful book *Busman's View*.

It was on a visit to Edinburgh that he met Margherita; they eloped on January 7, 1935 and were married in Gretna Green. To appease disconcerted parents, they were married again in a register office and once again in church. This unorthodox start seems to have worked for them and Margherita's death 57 years later.

The couple became avid travellers and campers, ex-

ploring most of Eastern Europe, Greece and the Balkans in a series of elderly cars and a disreputable motorhome. They came to be known as much by Albanian brigands as by the intelligentsia of Greece, and earned the respect of all who knew them. After the second world war, and now with three young sons, they repeated many of their earlier journeys, this time managing to pack everyone into a motor-cycle and sidecar.

Roly and Margherita returned to teaching for the last 15 years of their working lives before retiring to Cossington. He was a man who never gave up either learning new lessons or imparting what he had learnt to others. During his retirement, Roly concluded his theory of the lessons to be learnt from history in his parables *The Sons of Adam*. He was just beginning to communicate this message to correspondents on the Internet via the computer he acquired on his 80th birthday.

Roly will be missed for his stimulating conversations, his wisdom, his extraordinary breadth of learning and understanding, but above all for his compassion and his love for his fellow man. He is survived by his three sons.

Rev N W Steel

Guthart Roland Wason, archaeologist, lens grinder, bus driver and writer, born April 2, 1907; died January 6, 1998

Birthdays

Michael Attenborough, executive producer, Royal Shakespeare Company, 48; Dr David Attenborough, chairman, Guinness Mahon Holdings, 71; David Banks, former editor, Daily Mirror, 50; Caroline Blackston, actress, 65; Liam Brady, football manager, 42; Prof Derek Burke, nutritionist, 68; Jacqueline Clarke, actress, 55; Brian Deacon, actor, 49; Prof Janet Finch, sociologist, vice-chancellor, Keele University, 52; Baroness Flather, vice-chairman, Refugees Council, 64; Peter Gabriel, rock artist, 49; Dr David Hessayon, horticultural author, 70; John Healey, Labour MP, 38; Beate Klarsfeld, war crimes investigator, 59; Prof Lord Lewis of Newnam, chemist, warden, Robinson College, Cambridge, 70; John McAlloon, Labour MP, 50; Keith Nichols, jazz pianist, 53; Kim Novak, actress, 65; Lord (John) Peyton, 70, and Lord (Piers) Fynn, 76, former Conservative ministers; Oliver Reed, actor, 60; Margaretta Scott, actress, 56; George Segal, actor, 64; Donald Sauter, actor, 55; Jean-Jacques Schreiber, editor and French politician, 74.

Death Notices

ERLEMAN, Martha (Mrs), on February 11th 1998, aged 81, widow of the late Maurice Erleman, M.P. Loving and beloved mother of Sonia and Rebecca. Devoted grandmother, adoring great-grandmother. Buried at Basingstoke Jewish Cemetery, Basingstoke, Hampshire on February 12th 1998. Family and friends invited to service at 12.30pm, Sunday, February 15th 1998. Donations to Jewish Community Centre, 100, St. James' Road, Basingstoke, Hants. RG24 0AA. Tel: 01256 333333.

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COMPUTER SYSTEMS

Railtrack names its price for tunnel link rescue

David Gow
Industrial Editor

RAILTRACK yesterday held out for less stringent government controls over its finances and operations as the price for the rescue of the troubled Channel Tunnel rail link which is on the brink of collapse.

The group's board said it would only consider a proposal to bail out the high-speed link from London to the tunnel "if it could be sensibly financed and gave Railtrack and its shareholders the commercial terms to justify involvement in a project of this scale and risk".

Earlier this week, Gerald Corbett, Railtrack's chief executive, revealed a £1.3 billion alternative to the original scheme in which a high-speed link from St Pancras, north London, to the tunnel would be built for £5.4 billion.

His new plan would take the link only half-way to London, cutting only 15 minutes off the journey time to and from Paris by Eurostar rather than the half hour originally proposed by the founding London & Continental Railways consortium.

LCR has until the end of this month to find new backers for its project and convince John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister and Transport Secretary, it is viable. But analysts dismiss this and a renewed offer by Euro-rail, the Kvaerner-led consortium that lost out to LCR in the original bidding process, as "hopelessly unviable".

Railtrack said yesterday that the future of the rail link, "as one of the largest railway schemes seen in the UK this century", was of significant interest and it had the financial resources and management expertise to assist — though its priority remained its £1.2 billion a year investment programme.

City analysts said Railtrack was pressing Mr Prescott to admit that the only viable option was to allow cross-subsidisation from existing track to the new rail-link via a looser regulatory regime.

"You can't shelve it, for reasons of international prestige; only a loony would fund it from scratch when the returns cannot be got with the current number of passengers; and the Treasury would veto any plans for the Government to finance it," said one.

One option being canvassed would be for the regulator to let Railtrack make better returns on its existing network and use excess profits to build the new line to Folkestone. The existing regulatory regime runs out in 2001 but the softer line would enable Railtrack to fix its revenues for much longer.

The 25 train operating companies and passengers would, it was pointed out, bear the burden of cost involved in such a deal — rather than taxpayers as a whole.

This might cause problems for Mr Prescott but is seen by the City as a solution likely to command support from the Chancellor, Gordon Brown. It would then pave the way for Railtrack to secure its objective of taking over responsibility for running the tracks, signalling and stations on the debt-laden London Underground on a similar basis.

Railtrack officials last night confirmed that the regulatory review was uppermost in the company's considerations. "We want to have to bear that do it to see whether it's a viable proposition for us before we commit ourselves," they said.

● The Government last night dismissed reports that it could be forced to pick up the bill for £420 million of borrowings accumulated by LCR. Officials said the four credit banks would be repaid from Eurostar profits over the next decade.



Virgin aims to put the fizz back into the growth of its cola as Dr Pepper surges ahead in US and 7 Up stems decline

PHOTOGRAPH: ROGER TOOTH

Branson takes full control of Virgin Cola

Julia Finch

RICHARD Branson's Virgin Group has taken full control of the Virgin Cola operation after a dispute over strategy with its former equal partner Cott Corporation.

Mr Branson's cola brand, which was launched in a blaze of publicity in 1994, has so far failed to meet his ambitious sales targets.

The Virgin chief wanted his cola to overtake Pepsi, which has 17 per cent of the market, as the nation's number two brand.

But three and a half years after launch it has just 4.7 per cent of the market, and in November last year slumped to a 2.3 per cent share when Pepsi started an aggressive marketing campaign.

Virgin's dispute with Cott Corporation, a Canadian com-

pany which specialises in making own-brand colas for supermarkets, is centred on Virgin's determination to build an upmarket, premium international brand.

Cott, it is understood, believes Mr Branson has no chance of attaining that goal and thought the cola would achieve greater sales if it was cheaper.

The disagreement over strategy prompted Cott to offer its 50 per cent stake in the venture to Virgin. The Canadian company will continue to manufacture the

drink for Virgin but its contract has not yet been extended beyond the end of this year.

Yesterday Nick Kirkbride, managing director of Virgin Cola, said the split was "a deal that suited both parties. We were increasingly two dif-

ferent businesses. When we set up they were in expansive mode. Since then they have changed."

A spokesman for Cott said: "Virgin wants to build its brand name, whereas we are focused on retailer-branded soft drinks, and Virgin is not a retailer."

One third of Virgin Cola's sales come from Tesco. At the time of launch the supermarket group adopted the Branson brand as its own "in-house" premium label. But it has since introduced its own Tesco American-style cola to rival the Virgin brand.

Details of Virgin's split with Cott comes only just after Mr Branson's company withdrew its Virgin Vodka brand from retailers after slow sales.

It will now be sold mainly through duty free shops and into pubs and clubs through a wholesaler.

Doctor's cure perks up Cadbury

SHARES in Cadbury Schweppes rose yesterday as the company revealed strong sales figures for its soft drinks business in the United States market, writes Julia Finch.

The group's Dr Pepper brand grew by around 80 per cent more than the market average and figures for its key 7 Up brand show that a worrying decline in its sales could be slowing.

The 7 Up brand has been battered by competition from Sprite, and Cadbury had to relaunch it with a new advertising campaign to prevent it continuing to lose market share.

Yesterday's figures show the worst may be over. Sales were down 2 per cent in the first nine months, but held steady in the final three months.

Among Cadbury's other

US brands, its fruit-flavoured Dr Pepper was the star. While the total US market for soft drinks climbed 3 per cent, Dr Pepper grew 5 per cent.

Cadbury's results, which pushed the company's shares up 12.5p to 727p, came as new figures on the \$63 billion US soft drinks market were published. They showed Coca-Cola Co now has 43.9 per cent.

Treble trouble trips up Shell

Pauline Springett

OIL GROUP Royal Dutch/Shell yesterday disappointed the City with results which were hit by a triple whammy of falling oil prices, stronger sterling and turmoil in the Asian economy.

Shell shares fell 13.5p to 408.25p as analysts digested the figures, which were particularly gloomy for the final quarter. Net income for 1997 fell by 17 per cent to £4,736 million. In the last quarter income sank by 32 per cent to \$282 million.

Shell said that although it had achieved lower operating costs and increased oil production, it had been badly affected by the falling crude oil prices. The average price of Brent crude was \$19.10 a barrel in 1997, compared to \$20.65 the previous year.

The price decrease in the first half of last year largely reflected the resumption of exports from Iraq, which increased world supply, according to the company.

The position was exacerbated in November when Opec increased production quotas. "This, combined with a growing impact of the Asian economic crisis on demand, and a relatively mild winter in the northern hemisphere, resulted in lower crude prices, some \$16 a barrel by the end of the year," said Shell. Prices have continued to fall this year.

The group's petrochemicals operations were hit by the Asian economic crisis in the fourth quarter. But the impact was limited by the fact that many contract prices were already agreed, and the supply of several products was tight.

The company warned that the continuing poor Asian economic outlook could have a far greater impact on this year's results.

The gas business was also disappointing, with sales down 4 per cent at eight billion cubic feet a day, because of warm weather throughout Europe and, to a lesser extent, in Japan.

Genetic engineer gathers more seed

Mark Tran in New York and Roger Cowe

MONSANTO, the controversial US chemical company, is aiming to expand its activities in genetically modified food through the takeover of a leading seed company.

The \$3 billion group, whose activities range from the Nutrasweet sugar substitute to plastics and resins, has come in for fierce criticism around the world for its genetically modified soy beans.

Monsanto is planning to bid for the US firm DeKalb, which is worth up to \$2.2 billion. A successful deal would cement the company's position as a world leader in hi-tech agriculture.

It is already a major shareholder in DeKalb and has been working with the Chicago company to develop insect and herbicide resistance in crops such as corn and soy beans.

Other companies expected to bid include Dow Chemical, Agrevo — a joint venture of Schering and Hoechst of Germany — and Cargill, the Minneapolis agricultural business conglomerate.

DeKalb said that the decision to sell reflected the estate planning needs of the Roberts family, which founded the company 80 years ago.

Monsanto has been criticised around the world for altering the gene structure of soy beans, which campaigners claim can lead to unforeseen problems. The firm has been further attacked for failing to separate conventional from modified beans.

Consumers have complained that they are unable to avoid buying food produced from the modified beans, which are used in two-thirds of all food products on supermarket shelves.

Retailers have responded by warning that any product containing soy beans could contain genetically modified ingredients. Monsanto has shrugged off the complaints, arguing that its Roundup soy product is more efficient for farmers to grow.

News in brief

870 UK jobs facing axe in BICC revamp

BICC, the cables and construction group, yesterday warned that 870 British jobs face the axe as part of its global reconstruction programme. The UK revamp consists of two deals, both involving rival group Delta. The first involves BICC buying Delta's copper rod mill and enamelled wire business for £17.8 million. This will result in the closure of the Delta rod mill and enamelled wire factory in Enfield, north London, with the loss of 220 jobs. Production will be concentrated at BICC's factories in Merseyside.

The second deal, which must be approved by the Office of Fair Trading, involves a swap between Delta and BICC of some of their cable operations. BICC is to concentrate on the production of industrial cable, while Delta will focus on the manufacture of building wire cable.

BICC will pay Delta \$5.2 million to acquire Delta's industrial cable businesses in Enfield, Swansea and Derby. Delta will acquire the BICC building wire business at Wrexham, as well as Halesby, Cheshire.

These changes are likely to lead to the loss of a further 650 jobs, because the deal is likely to result in the closure of cable factories at Enfield, Derby, Swansea and Wrexham. BICC's shares were unchanged at 139½p. — Pauline Springett

Busy BAA flying high

AN all-time record seven million passenger used BAA airports in January, according to the airports authority. The seven BAA airports, which include Britain's busiest, Heathrow and Gatwick, recorded a 6.9 per cent rise in passenger traffic over the month.

A recovery in the Asian market accounted for much of the growth. After falling in November and December during the financial turmoil, Asian travel recovered in January. The company's finance director, Russell Walls, said he expected the Asian market to grow further as weaker currencies encouraged more Western people to travel there but added that the market could drop again later this year. — Charlotte Denry

Bid puts Watmoughs on a high

THE value of Watmoughs soared nearly 20 per cent to £219 million yesterday after the printing group said it had received an approach which might prompt a cash bid higher than the \$188 million made by Quebecor Printing of Canada last December.

The Bradford-based group — which prints for five of the UK's seven national newspapers — said the approach might lead to an offer "substantially in excess" of 300p per share — ahead of the 257p a share from Quebecor.

The Canadian offer has since been put on hold awaiting a decision on whether or not to refer the offer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Watmoughs' shares rose 46½ to 320p. — Tony May

Northern Rock rate down

NORTHERN ROCK yesterday announced plans to trim its standard home loan rate by 0.2 per cent, despite the Bank of England's warning that the next move in interest rates was likely to be up. The Newcastle-based group has reduced its mortgage rate to 8.5 per cent immediately for new borrowers and from April 1 for existing borrowers, provided base rates do not go up next month. Repayments on a £50,000 interest only loan will fall by £7.60 to £325.50.

The Halifax, the UK's biggest mortgage provider, and the Nationwide Building Society, have no plans to change their rates. Adam Applethorpe, Northern Rock executive director, believed it was difficult to be clear about what was happening to underlying base rates. He said: "However, based on the current level, it seems to us a good time to provide a general fillip." — Teresa Hunter

Lender forced to cut rates

Rupert Jones

THOUSANDS of customers of a controversial mortgage company will benefit after the Office of Fair Trading forced it to abandon oppressively high interest rates and massive early redemption penalties.

City Mortgage Corporation borrowers, including some facing legal action, will make "substantial" savings as a result of the changes.

CMC targets people on low incomes and those with poor credit ratings, and has frequently been criticised for using dual interest rates, where the mortgage repayments rise dramatically if the customer misses a payment, and imposing exorbitant penalties for early redemption of loans.

The new terms represent an essential step towards reducing the "considerable detriment" suffered by CMC customers, said OFT director-general, John Bridgeman. The changes, which will remove "unfair" penalties from loan agreements, apply to all CMC loans taken out before August 1, 1997. The company, based in Watford, Hertfordshire, had already agreed to stop writing new loans using the unfair terms from this date.

Previously, when a borrower missed a repayment, they were switched to an 18 per cent rate of interest instead of the usual "concessional" rate of 9.9 per cent. Under the new system, the higher rate is now 12.4 per cent, and this will be imposed only when a borrower is three months behind with their payments. It will then fall back again once the arrears are paid.

The changes affect about 11,600 of CMC's 38,000 borrowers. The company is said to have started several hundred court hearings against customers since it came into being in May 1996, and admits to having repossessed 215 homes.

Mr Bridgeman said: "The severity of the double penalties in CMC mortgages was unacceptable."

A company spokesman said: "This agreement with the OFT marks a milestone in CMC's on-going review of business practices. CMC can now concentrate on meeting demand from borrowers in a sector that continues to expand."

Go for a meal and enjoy a bottle of wine that's full bodied, fruity and playful on the palate.

The Observer

Starting this Sunday, collect 2 tokens on consecutive weeks and get a free bottle of wine (worth £9) in any Slug & Lettuce bar. Should go down well. — the Slug and Lettuce

The Guardian

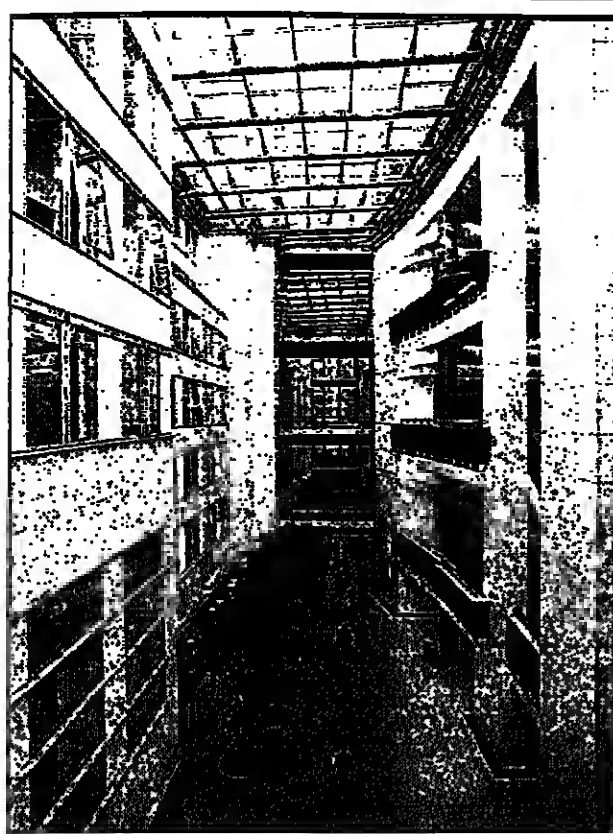


Fig trees tower over officials inside the spacious Brussels building
PHOTOGRAPH: NATHALIE KOULISCHER

Stoned by the crows: MEPs' new palaces cost a billion

Stephen Bates in Brussels

DEMOCRACY may be the least bad form of political accountability, but in Europe it certainly does not come cheap. As far as the European Union is concerned, it dwells in marble halls with a price tag of a billion pounds.

Belgium's King Albert II formally inaugurated a new parliament for the European Union in Brussels yesterday. The 15-storey, gleaming plate-glass complex cost £760 million and has 2,600 offices. The debating chamber will be used by MEPs for about six days a year.

Just 280 miles down the road, in Strasbourg, they are putting the finishing touches to another parliament building for the EU, to be opened later this summer.

It is costing £380 million, has 1,133 offices and its debating chamber will be used by the same MEPs for 12 weeks a

year. To ferry between the two requires a fleet of pan-tantrons twice a month at a cost of £80 million a year.

The Strasbourg effort will replace an existing parliament building which dates all the way back to 1977 and so is clearly out of date. "Never mind," a French official was overheard saying yesterday. "When we open our building, we'll do it much better. We'll get Chirac along."

"There has been quite a competition between Strasbourg and Brussels," said Tory MEP James Provan. "It's a case of competitive ceremonial."

"Of course this building's expensive but compare it with the Millennium Dome: that's cost everyone in Britain about £12 a head. This will cost about £3 each and hopefully the European Parliament will be around for rather longer."

The Brussels parliament building has rooms for 1,000 MEPs — of whom there are

only 626 at present — to accommodate EU enlargement into eastern Europe.

Each MEP's office is equipped with a shower (at a cost of £7,000), desk (£2,000), 30-channel television, computer with Internet access, and a free telephone.

Labour MEP Glyn Ford admitted: "It is all rather splendid but I never asked for a shower and there are many better things we could have spent all this money on."

If your elected representative can ever tear himself away, he can stroll down acres of corridors as wide as a dual carriageway, admiring the shops, banks and restaurants provided.

The Dutch MEP Florus Wiersma has already been warned against riding his bicycle around the building to get from one far-flung meeting to another.

In order to forestall ridicule, the parliament temporarily barred television cameras from filming inside the

building — especially the showers. But cutting off the oxygen of publicity was more than the MEPs could stand. There is to be a rapid reaction unit to deflect malicious and ill-informed criticism instead.

The fact that Europe now has two parliaments (it actually has a third, halfway between the other two in Luxembourg, but they've only ever used that once) can be put down to French bloody-mindedness.

In defence of Strasbourg's right to hold assemblies, the French threatened to block the last European elections until they got a guarantee of 12 sessions a year there.

The new Brussels parliament has already had teething troubles. Many of the glass panels in the roof have already been shattered, reportedly by the beaks of local crows or the stones they drop as they vainly seek access to the greenery growing inside. So far, there has been the most eloquent protest.



An exterior view of the parliament, opened by Belgium's King Albert II yesterday
PHOTOGRAPH: JACQUES COLLEY

Figures of fun

New European Parliament, Brussels

- 750-seat chamber
- 350-seat visitors' gallery
- 78 meeting rooms
- 2,600 offices
- 1,500 parking spaces
- Cost: £746 million
- Use: Committee meetings most weeks and six full meetings, each lasting one day, each year

New European Parliament, Strasbourg

- New complex opening this year: □ 750-seat chamber (room for expansion to 1,000)

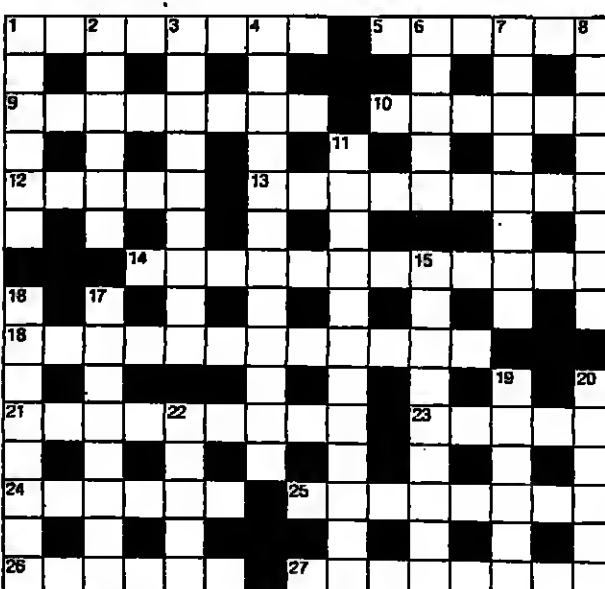
- 1,133 offices
- 100 meeting rooms
- Six restaurants and six bars
- Cost: £350 million
- Use: 12 week-long parliamentary sessions each year

- Distance between two parliaments: 280 miles. Parliamentary secretariat and library based in Luxembourg, 140 miles from both, has parliamentary chamber, used once, in 1986

- Cost of moving between Brussels and Strasbourg: £80 million a year

Guardian Crossword No 21,197

Set by Plodge



Across

- 1 They get into jams when first boy wanders (8)
- 5 Seasoned to lose a penny to gain a pound? 1 down might be (6)
- 9 Brains press bosses? (8)
- 10 Where to find 15c? Gold's leading the way (6)
- 12 Self-proclaimed exterminator lacked style when caught out (5)
- 13 Blooming Queen, running around (9)
- 14 Model supporter of false teeth seen in Vogue (7,5)
- 14 Art stole biro, knocked off erasers (12)
- 21,26 Organising a couch to receive overzealous spectators' circle? Sweet (8,6)
- 23 Despatch as Allah ordained (5)
- 24 Let in wonky nail? Half a quid! (8)
- 25 Fish swallowed us men, horribly devoured (8)
- 26 See 21
- 27 State briefly: "Heartless lady, with decoration" (8)

Down

- 1 Short and sweet (and French) (6)
- 2 Financial supporters, sometimes on horseback (6)
- 3 See 20
- 4 This is the absolute limit! (3,2,3,4)
- 6 Flexible installation in floodlit heritage centre (5)
- 7 Wolsey bodily captured Undine's heart (8)
- 8 Deported without drink, sipped mixed gins, made plans (6)
- 11 8 to flop? Help to be the one with most votes (3,2,3,4)
- 15 Buyer heard contented feline circling hunt (8)
- 16 Making a hash, part boil the item, add cold water... (8)
- 17 ... till food is cooked. It's as clear as day (8)
- 19 Like the bird, fell headlong without the bill (6)
- 20,3 Fat lady barks "Aie", 8 to be 25 at any hour (3,3,9)
- 22 Two Europeans agree on board (5)

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CROSSWORD SOLUTION 21,196



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Amount Financed	£8,604.00	£11,412.00
36 Monthly Repayments	£239.00	£317.00
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